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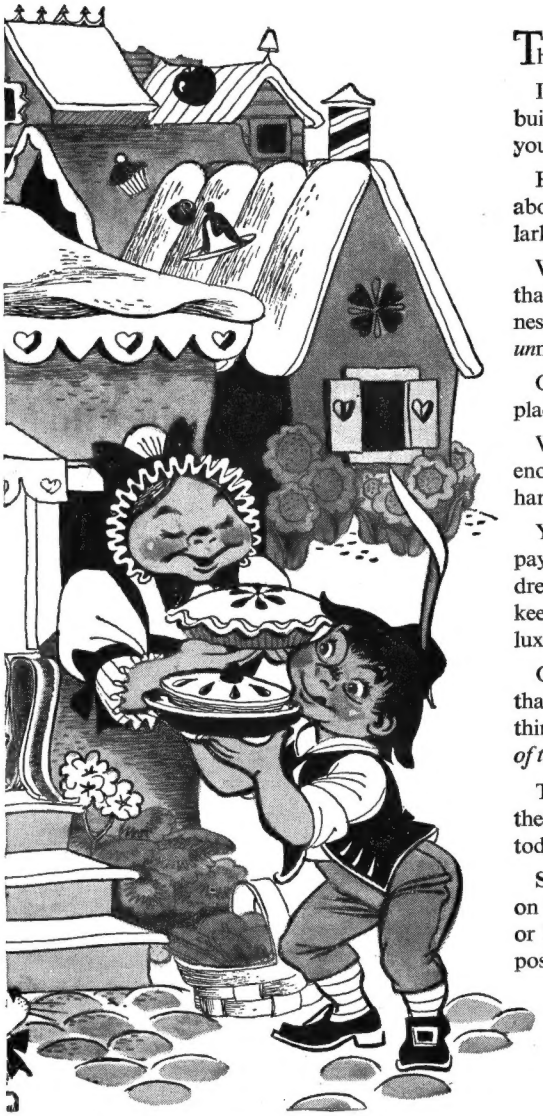

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TEN DETECTIVE ACES

July, 1949 Vol. LVII, No. 1

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Cover by Norman Saunders

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Shroud Me Not

Sensational Detective Novelet

By H. Q. Masur

Trying to probe murder's strange secret, he not only fell into the arms of the Law—but had to shake hands with Death as well.

CHAPTER I

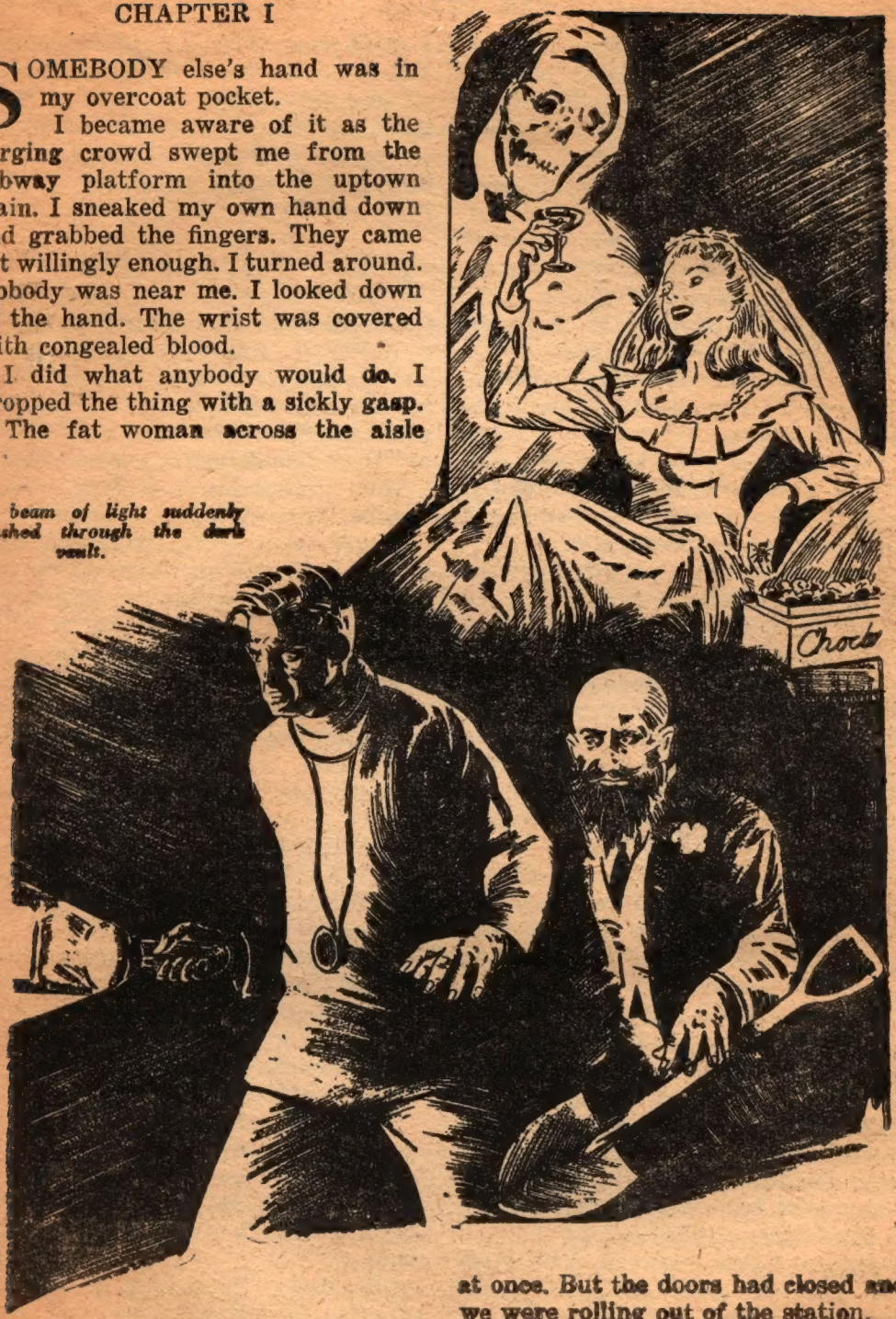
SOMEBODY else's hand was in my overcoat pocket.

I became aware of it as the surging crowd swept me from the subway platform into the uptown train. I sneaked my own hand down and grabbed the fingers. They came out willingly enough. I turned around. Nobody was near me. I looked down at the hand. The wrist was covered with congealed blood.

I did what anybody would do. I dropped the thing with a sickly gasp.

The fat woman across the aisle spotted it. Her scream must have been audible all the way to Hoboken. Then the others saw it and we almost had a riot. Everybody tried to clear wildly out of the train in all directions at once. But the doors had closed and we were rolling out of the station.

The hand lay on the floor, quietly, like something out of a nightmare, with the ends of a piece of adhesive tape showing on the first and last knuckles. I couldn't take my eyes off it.



A beam of light suddenly flashed through the dark vault.

Then the conductor pushed through to investigate the commotion. Nobody had to tell him. His eyes followed the appalled focus of everyone's gaze. He grinned, probably thinking it was a gag from one of those magic novelty stores. He lost the grin fast enough when he bent over to pick it up. You could hear him squawk over the gnashing screech of wheels, jerking his fingers away as if the hand carried an electric charge.

"It's his," someone yelled, and accusing fingers pointed at me from every direction.

The conductor backed away and looked at me, swallowing. "Don't try anything funny, mister. You can't get out until I open the doors."

I wouldn't have tried anyway. There were at least half a dozen guys in the car who were ready to jump me. The conductor said something to a tall boy in a porkpie hat and the boy hurried toward the front of the train. A moment later I heard the engineer's whistle. He was signaling to the station up ahead, asking them to have a cop ready when the train. pulled in.

We went thundering through the concrete tube, rocking from side to side, wheels clattering angrily, and then I felt the drag of airbrakes as we slowed down.

What the hand had been doing in my pocket was a mystery. A bigger mystery was whose arm it came off. I couldn't even guess, unless someone was trying to get rid of it and had stuck it in my pocket as the easiest way. Certainly nobody I knew had a sense of humor gruesome enough to think it was funny.

Station lights flickered, steel girders whirled past, and the train ground to a stop. Hostile eyes pinned me where I stood until the doors slid open and a cop came in. Then, before he could speak, a dozen voices gave him the story.

He was a young cop and there was nothing in the rule books covering a situation like this; nothing he'd learned at the Police Academy either. But he knew where his authority ended and he wasted no time on dialogue. He threw a pair of handcuffs on me and borrowed a sheet of newspaper with which he picked up the hand and off we went.

THEY must have built Police Headquarters when New York City real estate was selling for about a dollar a square foot. The dank musty odor would disappear only when the wreckers went to work. You could smell it in the office of Lieutenant Detective John Nola, Homicide.

Nola is a small dark man, neatly dressed, with eyes that waste neither time nor space, alert, intelligent, and faintly cynical from having seen too much of life. A career cop who knew his job and had no political allegiances. We knew and respected each other. They just hauled me into his office and he sat behind his scarred desk, studying me without much pleasure.

"All right," he said. "Let's have it."

"There's nothing to tell, lieutenant. I don't know how the hand got into my pocket."

"Guess."

I shrugged. "Maybe some medical student sliced it off one of the cadavers at Bellevue and dropped it into my pocket as a gag."

"You know nothing about it?"

"Not a thing."

He leaned forward and looked at me hard. "Your name was on the hand."

"What?" I sat bolt upright and stared at him in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Precisely. There was a piece of adhesive tape stuck across the palm and on it was written: *Watch out, Mr. Harvey St. John."*

I was jarred. I couldn't believe my ears. I sat rooted in my chair, my mind a complete blank. The message was unmistakably addressed to me. No doubt about that. I was Harvey

St. John. But why? And what was I supposed to watch out for?

Nola said quietly, jabbing his finger, "Look, St. John, you're a lawyer. This thing must tie in with some case you're working on. According to the medical examiner, that hand didn't come off any old corpse; it was detached from a man still alive or one freshly dead. Now I want the facts, all of them, without any legal double talk or that old saw about privileged communications." He leaned back, "Spill it."

I spread my hands in a helpless gesture. "Lieutenant," I said candidly, "there are about ten active cases in my office at the moment. I can't imagine what this is all about. It's thrown me for a loss. My files are open to the department and if you—"

THE telephone rang. Nola unbent an elbow at it and pronounced his name into the mouthpiece. He listened for a moment, then brought me back into narrow-eyed focus.

"Do you know a private detective named Steve Gurney?" he said.

"Sure," I said.

"Ever use him?"

"In my business, lieutenant, a private detective often serves a very real and useful purpose."

"Working for you now?"

"Why, yes."

"On what?"

Suddenly I realized what he was driving at and I began to feel sick. "Oh, no," I whispered, shaking my head, "not Steve . . ."

"That's right." Nola's face was grimly set. "We keep a fingerprint record of all private operators on file. They check. It's Gurney's hand all right."

Gurney's hand. I slumped heavily. Then Steve Gurney was probably dead. And it might have been me who sent him out to get killed.

"Suppose you tell me what he was working on," Nola said. "For Pete's sake, snap out of it. St. John. It's not your fault. Getting killed is one of the occupational hazards of being a detective. Tighten up, boy. Our big job now is to find out what happened and nail the guy who's responsible."

I took a moment to get organized. It's not easy to accept the fact of death, at least not the death of a man you've known and spoken to only the day before. Then I inhaled deeply and gave him what I knew of the story.

"It started with a girl named Fay Stanton," I said, "who came East from a little town called Mill Pond in Arizona. She was trying to find her aunt, a rich old dame who used to live at the Berkeley Arms on Park Avenue. But it seems the aunt had moved to one of those exclusive nursing homes for aged invalids out on Long Island. When the girl went there to inquire, they were very uncooperative and told her that the aunt had left on a trip with another guest and they didn't know where she was."

Nola was listening with his lips pushed out.

"So the girl came to you?" he said.

"Yes. And I put Steve Gurney on it."

"Now Steve Gurney is dead."

"That's right, lieutenant. But Gurney was working on other cases too, and any one of them might have led to foul play."

"Except for one thing, St. John. His hand was found in your pocket with a warning message addressed to you."

That was enough to clinch the argument and I nodded morosely.

"What was the aunt's name?" Nola asked.

"Mrs. Elvira Schubert."

"And the name of the nursing home?"

"Longview."

"You been out there to talk to them?"

"Not yet."

The pencil in Nola's hand was idle since he failed to make notes. He didn't have to. He had a remarkable memory and every word vibrating against his eardrums got registered

on a photographic plate in his brain. He sat back measuring me carefully with his shrewd eyes. He knew I wouldn't lie. Lying to Nola would get me about as far as Karl Marx with the National Association of Manufacturers.

After eliciting a few more facts, mostly routine, and batting it around for another thirty minutes, he wound up the inquisition and waved his hand in dismissal.

I left him barking at the telephone, ordering one of his men to bring the girl down town.

BUT the lieutenant was going to have to wait. Miss Fay Stanton was not at her hotel. She was in my office. And she had brought company.

The man who bounced off a chair to shove a hand at me was in his early thirties, a tall, lean specimen, with a careless forelock hanging over his left temple and the flashing smile of a toothpaste ad.

"Glad to know you, Mr. St. John. Damn glad."

Exuding personality and energy, the type of bird who is worth his weight in platinum as a salesman on any used car lot in the country.

Fay Stanton smiled and introduced us. "This is Malcolm Leising, Mr. St. John. My fiancé."

Something new had been added. She hadn't mentioned a boy friend to me before. Not that I was surprised. The real prizes like Fay Stanton don't go begging for long on the open market, and though Leising didn't make my heart palpitate, still I was reeady to concede his obvious charms for the female sex. I got a smile from the girl and a little more information about the man.

"He's from Mill Pond, too," Fay Stanton said. "He came to New York a couple of months ago and we're going to be married. This afternoon."

"Congratulations."

"Thank you, old man. Damn nice of you!" Leising finally released my hand. "If you're not doing anything this afternoon, we'd like you to stand up for me, best man, you know. Appreciate it. Don't know many people in town."

I told him that I couldn't possibly, and thanked him for the honor. He sat down, never losing his smile, and crossed his knees.

"Have you any news about my aunt?" Fay Stanton inquired.

"A little," I said. I got behind my desk and added, "From now on the minimum standard equipment for anybody searching for your aunt will be a loaded elephant gun and the United States Marines."

Confusion clouded her eyes. "I—I don't understand . . ."

"It's like this, Miss Stanton. I sent a private detective out to trace the old lady and something happened to him."

She sat there looking alarmed and waiting for me to continue. I was trying to decide whether or not she had the stomach for it when she said, "Is he—is he dead?"

"I don't know. Probably." Then I opened the bag and dumped it in her lap because after all it was her problem as well as mine. I said, "Somebody cut his hand off, pasted a warning message on it, and dropped the thing into my pocket."

There, it was out.

Intestinal fortitude was something she hadn't been short-changed on. It wasn't exactly the kind of information to send anybody off in a peal of laughter. While it staggered her and turned her complexion slightly green, still she didn't slide back in a faint.

THERE are few girls who can manage to look attractive with a face left naked by shock and horror. Fay Stanton was one of them. She had everything most girls have and yet there was a difference. She was slender but not bony, and a tight sweater would have been positively indecent on her. She was not

wearing a sweater however, and if her clothes had been purchased at Mill Pond, then the movies and the magazines had made every one-horse town across the nation fashion conscious.

Even though she was smartly turned out there was something about the wide blue eyes and the cornsilk hair that carried a flavor of lavender and old lace. A man wouldn't be apt to stop off at the corner saloon if he knew a girl like this was waiting for him on the front porch after a hard day at the office.

Malcolm Leising looked at me with his jaw hanging against his tieknot, speechless, an unusual state for the guy.

Fay, her voice small and muffled, asked, "But why would anybody do such a thing?"

"That's what I aim to find out."

Leising found his voice. "You're not joking, are you?"

"About a thing like this? Don't be silly." I turned to the girl. "Now Miss Stanton, let us dig in, if you please, and come up with a fresh assortment of facts. Something concrete. How long had your aunt been a widow?"

She swallowed and sat up straight and put her lips firmly together. "Fifteen years, at least."

"Where did her husband make his money?"

"Oil wells. He had a farm in Texas and they struck oil there. Some Eastern company took over and they paid him royalties. It was quite a lot of money until the wells ran dry."

"And she lives off her income?"

"Annuities. Aunt Elvira wrote that I would get whatever was left after she died."

"I see. When did you last hear from her?"

"About two months ago."

"From that nursing home?"

"Longview, yes."

"She mention anything about taking a trip?"

"Not a word."

"Could you tell from the tone of her letter whether she was unhappy or worried?"

The smooth brow puckered thoughtfully. "Not worried exactly. Plaintive, perhaps, mostly because she was so old. She was a little afraid of dying."

"People generally are," I commented dryly. "Did she have any friends, anyone she particularly mentioned in her letters?"

"Not Aunt Elvira. She'd always been withdrawn, shy, what you'd call an introvert, and she kept largely to herself."

Dandy, I thought. A fat lot of information can be dug up about a recluse.

"Well," I said, "don't be surprised if you get a visit from the police."

"The police!" Her eyes had become large and round.

"You bet. A severed hand is not something they'd be likely to ignore. Tell them everything, no secrets, understand?"

"But she has no secrets," Leising said.

"Fine. Then we'll have no trouble. And another thing, I want her to step carefully, somebody in this case is playing mighty rough."

Two vertical lines appeared between his eyes. "Look here, St. John, you're not trying to say she's in danger, are you?"

"I'm saying exactly that. It's up to you to keep an eye on her."

He draped an arm protectively over her shoulder and thrust out a resolute chin. "I will, old man. Damn right. You can rely on me."

"Okay. And as soon as I get some news I'll let you know."

"We'll be living at the Revere," Fay Stanton said. "Mal's place."

I took them to the door and let them out.

Then I sat down and put my elbow on the desk and my chin on my fist, like the man in the statue, and I reviewed the facts. When I added them up the total was small. Elvira Schubert had disappeared, and Steve

Gurney, searching for her, had lost his life. The thing to do was trace his movements. He had, undoubtedly, made a trip to Longview.

I got up, put on my hat and coat, and went down to the Long Island Railroad Station on 33rd Street.

CHAPTER II

THE ride out to the South Shore was nothing I'd want to make a habit of. There may be worse cars and worse roadbeds, but they're probably in Patagonia. And yet when I got off the train the crisp air and the clear sky and the smell of the Sound almost made the trip worth while. The taxi ride consumed another fifteen minutes and then I was at Longview.

Some millionaire had probably built the place as a private home. It had started out to be a medieval chateau, then fell under the Moorish influence, and finally wound up as a combination of three or four different periods of architecture.

Privacy was the watchword. Broken bottles had been cemented along the upper ledge of a thick stone wall that surrounded the grounds.

I went through the cast-iron gate, up a flagstone path, and touched a bell at the side of a heavy oak door. After a moment it opened and a stout woman with a grim-looking face, wearing a crisp white nurse's uniform, fixed me with a pair of uncompromising eyes.

"Yes?" The voice was sharper than a shoemaker's awl.

I gave her my most affable smile. "I'd like to see the man in charge."

"About what?" There was no indication of a thaw.

"My grandmother," I said. "The old lady would like to find a nice home in which to spend her declining years."

Evidently that was the right approach. She took me in from top to bottom and back up again. Although she tried to make her voice gracious, it would still slice a loaf of cheese.

"Come in. This way, please."

The interior was something to see. Near as I could judge, they had left the original furnishings intact. We went through an enormous drawing room, warm and sumptuous, crossing a Persian rug that was thinner than a handkerchief and older than sin. A few elderly women sat near the windows, conversing in hushed tones.

The place looked about as exciting as a game of whist with your maiden aunt.

The room ended in a small hallway that held a door on which the the name of its occupant was printed in gold leaf: *Mr. Adam Pristine.* The nurse knocked once, twisted the knob, opened, and announced:

"A gentleman to see you, Mr. Pristine. Business."

He waited for me to come across an office no bigger than the average hotel lobby; then he rose. The manipulation surprised me. In designing his body someone had lost all sense of proportion. He had a large head, a large face, and a large torso, but from there on down he seemed to be standing in a hole.

His legs were stubby, dwarflike, truncated, bringing his full height to less than five feet. That, however, was not his most conspicuous feature. The hair missing from his skull had apparently been transplanted to his chin. The growth was black and luxurious and clipped to a neat point over his vest. Square teeth looked out of the foliage in a bright, white smile.

"How do you do, sir. Welcome to Longview. Sit down, right there, the comfortable one."

I GOT myself deposited and then presented him with one of my cards. One look was enough to clear the smile away and replace it with an expression of annoyance.

"A lawyer," he said. "Confound it, I don't like lawyers."

He was going to like them a lot less when I got through with him.

"Mr. Pristine," I said briskly, "let's make this as brief and as painless as possible. I'm here to get some information about an inmate—"

"We don't call them inmates," he interrupted crossly. "This is not an institution. They're guests."

"About a guest then. Mrs. Elvira Schubert."

He pinched his bottom lip and looked at me. "What is your connection with Mrs. Schubert?"

"I represent her niece. Miss Fay Stanton."

"Oh, yes. That was the young lady who was here making inquiries." He touched a button on the desk. "There was very little we could tell her. You see— Come in"—he was answering a knock on the door—"come in, Charles. This is Dr. Charles Varney, the resident physician, my assistant. Mr. St. John is a lawyer, Charles. He's asking about Mrs. Schubert."

Varney made quite a contrast to his superior. His one hundred and fifty pounds were distributed along an attenuated body that stretched well over six feet from his white shoes. His gray eyes were distant and his thin face had a brooding look. His manner, while not exactly offensive, was curt and indifferent.

He said, "Did you explain that Mrs. Schubert took a trip against my advice?"

"I want you to tell him," Pristine said.

Dr. Varney put his eyes straight at me. "Mrs. Schubert was a stubborn old lady. She suffered from at least a dozen of the disorders attendant upon old age, nevertheless she insisted upon taking a trip to St. Petersburg, Florida, with another of our guest. A Mrs. Walker."

"What was her reason?"

He lifted his shoulders. "Boredom, I suppose."

"And their method of transportation?"

"They hired a car and a chauffeur."

"From whom?"

"We don't know. Mrs. Walker made all of the arrangements herself."

"Any forwarding address?"

"No. They promised to notify us when they arrived."

Adam Pristine was following the conversation by bouncing his eyes around between us, resting them on whoever was doing the talking at the moment.

I went on. "But the ladies intended to return here to Longview?"

"No doubt about that," Varney said with a nod. "They retained their respective rooms and left most of their belongings intact."

"Would it be possible," I asked, "to inspect Mrs. Schubert's room?"

The doctor deferred that one to his superior.

PRISTINE shook his head vigorously. "Out of the question, Mr. St. John. We cannot have people searching the rooms of our guests in their absence. It would be a violation of their privacy. No, I'm afraid not. There's nothing to justify it."

"That," I said, "is a matter of opinion. We'll come back to it later. You told all this information to Mr. Gurney?"

"Gurney?"

Both men exchanged glances and suffered a loss of expression. If they thought I muffed it they had another guess coming.

I said, "Steve Gurney was a private detective I hired to trace Mrs. Schubert."

"No such person consulted us," Pristine said, turning his hands up.

His eyes said something else. All right. So they were lying. They had seen Steve Gurney and they had spoken to him. It didn't have to mean anything though. Maybe they were reluctant to involve Longview in harmful publicity. I let it pass.

"Now about that room—"

"No, sir." Pristine was emphatic. "Absolutely not. That's out."

"If you don't want to co-operate with me, maybe you'd like to co-operate with the police."

He didn't jump. He looked at me with the aggrieved expression of a man buying French postcards that turn out to be pictures of the Louvre.

"The police have already been here. We gave them the same information we gave you and they appeared well satisfied."

So far as he was concerned that seemed to wind up the interview. His manner wasn't openly hostile but you could sense the friction. I spared them both a brief look, said good-by, turned, and marched out the door. The fat nurse waiting in the hall ushered me to the exit and made sure the lock on the gate clicked shut behind me.

Now it was cold. A spanking wind swept in from the Sound and I had to raise my coat collar over my chin. There was no sign of a taxicab, not much traffic of any kind, but I didn't care. I had other plans.

OFF the main thoroughfare a dirt road led around to the back of the estate. The nearest house shoved its chimney through some treetops about a quarter of a mile away. I guess they didn't like to be crowded around here. Well, that was their privilege. They had the dough for it.

It was the stone wall with the chipped beer bottles on top that posed a real problem. A beaut for an army obstacle course, that could put a whole regiment in the station hospital. A pole vaulter might have cleared it, or a guy with a helicopter. I used to run the hurdles at high school, but I kind of let things like that slide when I became an earnest young lawyer.

Since when did a skinful of broken glass ever stop an earnest young lawyer?

It stopped me all right.

Until I saw the tree. It was just a gnarled old maple tree with a trunk as thick through as an elephant's middle. But it had a fine stout branch that hung over the stone fence. I could climb out to the end of the branch and drop off on the other side of the fence.

A running start almost got me to the lowest branch. The third try did it and I pulled myself up. It wasn't easy. Try making like Tarzan with a Homburg and a heavy Chesterfield on some time.

I eased out along the branch. At this time of the year there were no leaves to bother me. The broken glass looked worse from above than it did from below. I sighed with relief when I passed the jagged-edged danger point.

The sigh was premature. It died in my throat at the same time the dog started howling.

He had dripping fangs and red-flecked eyes and he was chained to a stake. He damn near broke his neck trying to pull the stake out of the ground.

I crouched there on that branch and debated my next step. Maybe I could reach the house anyway. Maybe the people up there would think he was barking at a field mouse.

It stopped being a problem when the stake ripped out of the earth and the branch cracked at the same time.

The dog left the ground as I hit it. He came sailing through the air, a red-eyed demon, with a snarling rumble in his throat. A riot gun would have helped, or even a shillelagh. All I had was a penknife. But that was on my key chain, so I had to use my arm. Good-by sleeve. He ripped through it like tissue paper and got to my skin and I wrestled with him and yelled as the pain shot out in six directions.

I kicked him loose but he came back with my blood shining on his muzzle. I started to run and my trouser leg came off in shreds and he brought me down, floundering. Even if he didn't chew me to death I might get rabies or die of blood poisoning.

"Help!" I screamed.

Nobody came. The dog kept right on eating my arm. Grab a rock. There was a rock under my right hand.

Crack his skull. Beat his brains out. Kill the beast before he killed me. To hell with the S.P.C.A.! How about Darwin and his Survival of the Fittest?

I don't know who passed out first, but I kept hammering with the rock until consciousness left me.

CHAPTER III

I DON'T remember anybody carrying me back to the house. But there I was, in a small white room, with my arm and my leg swathed in bandages when I woke up. Dr. Charles Varney was good for something after all.

I didn't hurt at all where the dog had got at me. My head was heavier than a medicine ball though. I tried to move. I couldn't move. Something was wrong with the signaling system to my muscles. Maybe not. Maybe I was shot full of serum, for lockjaw, or something. Then again maybe I was loaded down with dope just to keep me quiet.

And what day was it? For all I knew it could have been a week since my fracas with the dog.

The door opened and the fat nurse leaned her grim face over mine. "So you're conscious. I'll call the doctor."

She went after Varney. He came in and went to work without a word, shoving a thermometer under my tongue and putting the cold end of a stethescope against my bare chest. I inhaled and exhaled according to instructions and then he folded his equipment away.

"That was a very foolish performance, St. John, and childish. What could you possibly hope to gain by sneaking back here on the premises?"

I asked another question right back at him.

"How long have I been here, doctor?"

"A little less than twenty-four hours."

Wednesday afternoon and I had been due in court on a case this morning. I tried to sit up. Nothing happened.

"What's wrong with me?" I asked in near panic. "I can't move."

"You'll be all right," he said.

"I gotta get out of here."

"You're free to leave anytime, St. John. Take my advice and stay another day."

"Impossible," I said. "Where are my clothes?"

"In that closet, what's left of them." He shrugged indifferently. "See that he gets dressed, nurse."

"No help needed," I growled with ill humor. "I can dress myself. And send me a bill."

He had started to turn away, but his head came around and our eyes met. "Look here, we're willing to forget your bill if you'll promise not to repeat your idiotic conduct of yesterday."

I stared him down. "You keep buying watch dogs and I'll keep killing them."

His mouth tightened. "Just what do you want, St. John?"

How many times did I have to tell the guy? "A look at Mrs. Schubert's room," I said.

His face set uncompromisingly. "Mr. Pristine told you no, and I repeat. *No.*" The door clapped shut behind him.

I was alone with the nurse. From the way she stood glued to the floor I could see she intended to watch me get dressed. If she wasn't bashful neither was I. I swung my feet out from under the covers and stood up in my underwear.

ARMY woolens and she didn't even crack a smile. What the hell, it was cold out. They had cut off the right sleeve and the left leg to get at the lacerated meat. I took one step and pain kicked me in the arm like a ten-ton truck.

I swayed unsteadily, rolled my eyeballs up under the lids, and fell right back into the nurse's arms. She had the strength of a Polish pipefitter. I

could have been a baby the way she carried me back to bed.

She chuckled. Pain didn't annoy her, so long as it was somebody else's.

I heard the door close. I opened one eye and found myself alone. It took me three minutes to get dressed and another three minutes to rig up a sling out of my display handkerchief.

A cautious peep into the hall showed that it was deserted. I was halfway down the hall before I found an open door.

"My goodness," said the little old lady who was sitting in a rocker and knitting a pair of argyle socks. "You're hurt."

I gave her a bland smile. "Nothing at all, madam. Just that I got caught in a revolving door."

She clucked sympathetically. "Modern living is so dangerous. It's a wonder anybody at all is alive."

She was right. With cosmic bombs and crazy motorists a guy could get killed—but not from a revolving door. A mad beast trained to chew the life out of you, maybe. That wasn't what I said. All I said was:

"What nice socks!"

She beamed. "They're for the Salvation Army. I don't have any relatives. Were you looking for someone?"

"Yes. My aunt. Mrs. Schubert."

The knitting needles became still. "Are you Elvira's nephew? That's odd. I thought she had a niece." She made more clucking noises. "What a pity she's not here to see you. She went to Florida."

"Florida?" My face fell. "Oh, that's too bad. Was she excited about the trip?"

"I really don't know. Elvira went away suddenly and I didn't see her before she left. Dr. Varney told me about it."

"She went alone?"

"No. With Mrs. Walker." The wrinkled face became vaguely puzzled. "Poor Mrs. Walker was quite ill and confined to her room. We haven't seen her for some time."

"Maybe she got better," I said. "I'd like to leave a note for Aunt Elvira. Which was her room?"

"Second from the end on the left. You're a nice young man."

The last I saw she was knitting away on all eight cylinders. Nobody, luckily, was in the corridor. Everything was quiet and peaceful. I found Mrs. Schubert's room and stepped in and closed the door behind me.

Late afternoon sunlight painted yellow shadows on the walls. The place was in shipshape order, with all the possessions an old woman would keep to make it cozy.

I searched. Even if she took three wardrobe trunks full of clothes away with her and they all got lost, she still wouldn't have to go around in her bloomers. There were plenty of dresses left in the closet. It looked like she never threw anything away.

In a bottom drawer I found two boxes that interested me. One contained chocolates, and the other held an annuity contract with the General Life Insurance Company that promised to pay Mrs. Elvira Schubert fifteen hundred dollars a month as long as she lived.

The chocolates were wrapped in tin foil and I ate one. It was so good I stuffed a handful into my pocket. No sense letting them get stale. The annuity contract I left in the drawer.

THEN I went out into the hall and saw a back stairway. It took me down to a storage pantry. Footsteps came along. I spied a door and slipped through it. This took me down some more stairs into a basement.

Dim illumination filtered through a high rectangular window. The place was like one of those subterranean vaults you see in the movies, with too many blind alleys, once you got across an acre or so of concrete. The walls were moist and dank. I thought one of the passages might lead me out on the grounds somewhere.

Maybe it would have; I never got the chance to follow it far enough to find out. A beam of light suddenly waltzed at me along the wall. I heard the hollow echo of voices, sounding like two drunks talking into an empty rain barrel.

Then the concentric beam of a pocket torch hit me spruce in the eyes and a harsh expletive grated against my ears.

"St. John!" It was Dr. Charles Varney, his voice as cold and as sharp as an icicle. "What are you doing here?"

I blinked. "Trying to find my way out," I told him honestly. "Damned if I'm not lost."

He wasn't amused. "Turn around and start back."

A shrill dissent came from the figure at his side. "You ought to teach him a lesson, Charles," Adam Pristine said. "He's a trespasser and we can use force."

"Nonsense," Varney said. "I'll attend to his departure personally. Start walking, St. John."

My right arm was out of business. If it were working maybe I could have flattened them and kept on going. Except that Pristine was right. I was a trespasser and if Varney had a gun he'd be justified in using it. So I did what I was told.

They marched me back to Pristine's office where Varney patronized the telephone to call a taxi. Both men sat back and stared at me with no trace of affability until the nurse announced that it had arrived. They watched me embark and saw me off.

Because of the hour I went home instead of back to the office. I was thinking of brandy when I keyed open the door. I forgot the brandy when I saw what was waiting for me.

Steve Gurney.

HE WAS sitting in my armchair, with his chin resting on his breastbone. His face was a gargoyle's face. He had died hard, damned hard. His left arm hung down between his knees and nothing showed beyond the cuff of his sleeve.

He'd been a private detective. He'd been killed. An occupational hazard, Lieutenant Nola had said. So is soldiering. So is being a daredevil. But the guy who earns a livelihood hanging by his toes from the wheels of an airplane at three thousand feet figures to catch it before old age gives him palsy.

Not Steve Gurney. His job was to shadow wayward husbands. To catch the deadbeats who disappear before their installment payments were completed on the watch in the one-tenth of fourteen karat gold-plated case. To track down nice old ladies.

That was the job I had given him.

Now look at him.

"It's not your fault," Lieutenant Nola had said.

Maybe not. I wouldn't split hairs about it. But somebody sure as hell was going to short-circuit two thousand volts in the Ossining broiler for this. I'd see to that.

The place was too neat. There was no blood on the carpet. He had died somewhere else and been carted in. A skeleton key would do the trick.

My mouth tasted bitter and my feet felt leaden when I reached the telephone and got through to Homicide.

"Steve Gurney," I told the lieutenant in a flat, parched voice. "He's here in my apartment."

Skip the next two hours.

There was more brass in my apartment than you'll find at the Annual Policemen's Benefit. The technical crew came and left dusting powder, exploded flash bulbs, chalk marks, and the stale odor of tobacco. The medical examiner's man offered it as his tentative opinion that Gurney had been poisoned, and approved removal of the body. An assistant district attorney with a Harvard accent, in a Brooks Brothers suit, fired a cross-examination at me almost as if I were in the dock charged with murder.

LIEUTENANT NOLA stayed on after the rest had departed.

He wanted to know more about how my arm got chewed up. I told him about Longview and about the dog, keeping nothing under my hat and playing nothing close to my vest.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"I don't know. They're a queer brace of ducks and I got nothing out of them."

Nola shut his teeth on a thin dappled cigar. He sat and thought and finally said, "Gurney was chasing after something dangerous and he caught it by the tail."

"Sure," I said. "It turned on him and he became a corpse."

"He died because he learned a secret."

It was a theory I was willing to go along with. "But what was the secret?"

"Learn that and you've got the killer."

"When will the M.E. know the exact cause of death?" I asked.

"They're posting him now. Soon."

I looked glum. "Did you talk to Miss Stanton?"

"I talked to Mrs. Malcolm Leising. She got married yesterday."

"Your conclusions?"

"She's clean."

"What about her husband?"

"The same. Works for some investment house down on Broad Street. You can have him."

I declined. "No, thanks. What else are you doing?"

"We wired the St. Petersburg police to try to locate Mrs. Schubert and Mrs. Walker."

"Results?"

"None yet. Too many old people down there to check."

I stood up. "Will you excuse me, lieutenant? I'm bushed, half dead."

He sighed. It was a peculiarly human thing for him to do and showed how this case was beginning to get him. When he was gone I emptied my pockets onto the coffee table, removed my jacket, and set about cleaning the apartment.

The place was almost presentable when the bell rang.

CHAPTER IV

I OPENED the door and got a whiff of Scotch whisky. The aroma was in the air, but the whisky itself was inside Fay Stanton Leising. She stood in the hall, weaving unsteadily. Her face was flushed, her eyes vague, her mouth loose.

"Hi," she mumbled, thick-tongued.

I pulled her inside. It wasn't my reputation that worried me. I just didn't want her to keel over and crack her pretty skull outside my door. Surprise exceeded shock. I hadn't pegged her as a girl who would hit the bottle. But then a girl gets married only once in a lifetime—most girls anyway—and this was a wedding celebration that looked as if it had lasted twenty-four hours.

She fell back against the cushions on the sofa and peeked coyly at me through a latticework made by her fingers. She snickered.

"Looked you up in the phone book."

"Where's your husband?" I demanded severely, planting myself in front of her.

She bobbed her head. "Dunno. Working, maybe. Drunk, maybe."

"What are you doing here?"

"Wanna know about Aunt Elvira. Gotta tell her about my wedding."

"We're still looking for her," I said. "Sit there while I make some coffee. Then I'm going to take you home."

"Candy," she exclaimed, spying the chocolates on the table and reaching for one.

"Go ahead," I said. "I took them from a box in your aunt's dresser."

She was peeling the tinfoil off when I headed for the kitchen, and she was munching another when I came back after starting the percolator.

"A policeman came to see me yesterday," she mumbled, her mouth full.

"That would be Lieutenant Nola."

"He's looking for Aunt Elvira too," she said.

"He'll find her if anybody can."

She dipped her chin and began to giggle. "Had a party last night. Didn't go to bed at all."

"Then you must be tired."

"Uh-huh."

Out in the kitchen the percolator made bubbling noises. I got up and filled a cup and brought it to her, black. She took the cup and sipped. It was hot enough and bitter enough to make her gasp. She was about half finished when she suddenly spilled the rest of it into her lap, dropping the cup on the floor.

She looked at me, her eyes frightened. Then her hands went down and clutched at her abdomen. I saw her face grow white and pinched. She came up off the sofa and began to tremble as if an alternating current was running through her system.

"Fay!" I cried, my heart hammering too fast and out of time. "In the name of heaven, what is it?"

She couldn't talk. The words got stuck in her throat. She gagged, trying to catch her breath. Her hand went out groping for a chair. The chair wasn't there. I caught her as she fell, limp, a dead weight in my arms.

She was alive. I knew that instantly. I fingered her wrist and felt a pulse that was weak and erratic. Her breathing came unevenly.

A doctor. Call a doctor. No, it would take too long. I yanked my bum right arm out of the sling and picked her up. It didn't hurt any more than if I'd stuck it into boiling oil. I staggered into the hall and into the self-service elevator. Down in the street we got a break; a cab stood idling at the curb.

"Polyclinic," I yelled at the driver. "Hit it hard."

HE WAS a good man. He went through signal lights as if he were color blind. New York spawns a breed of taxi driver who can handle the internal combustion vehicle with a reckless efficiency that is breathtaking. We ripped. In less time than par for the course we careened up the hospital driveway and I was lugging Fay through the receiving door.

"Poison," I blurted at the intern on duty.

He took over at once, snapping a crisp order at the nurse. "Emergency. Stomach pump. Call Dr. Bukantz."

They wheeled her away and I was alone. For the next thirty minutes I paced the waiting room, on edge, literally biting my fingernails. My brow was streaming, slippery with sweat, and I felt very low but I hung on, trying to get organized.

The pattern was ugly. First Steve Gurney. He'd gone out on a mission for me and been killed. Now the girl. She'd drunk some of my coffee and was dying.

A skeleton key would open my apartment door. All it needed was a few grains of cyanide or something in the coffee container. It might have been meant for me and it probably was. That was not an idea that improved even if I tried to ignore it. The door opened and the intern came in.

"Gone?" I asked.

"No. And the chances are she'll live. Being drunk was a mighty lucky break." He saw my puzzlement and added, "It's a fact that the deadly effects of arsenic are materially lessened when administered to an intoxicated person. I don't believe she'd taken much and we got the stuff out of her quickly."

I was weak with relief. "That's good news, Doc."

He wanted some information for the police, but I said I'd call them myself. I used the phone booth and reached Lieutenant Nola.

"Well . . ." he said after I'd spilled the story. He sounded thoughtful. "Tie that."

I had detected an odd tone in his voice and I pressed him. "What is it, lieutenant?"

"Arsenic, eh? Well, get a load of this. It was arsenic that also accounted for Gurney. What's more, the post mortem showed traces of chocolate in his stomach. They believe that's what held the poison."

I almost missed its significance. Then it hit me and for a moment I was speechless, bitter saliva threading down my throat, my fingers gripping the phone hard. The picture had sharpened and cleared as if someone had adjusted a focusing lens.

"Look, Nola," I said excitedly, "my coffee didn't poison that girl. It was chocolate—from the same box that finished Gurney."

"What!" he almost yelled.

"That's right. I hooked a few pieces from a box in Mrs. Schubert's room and Fay ate them."

I knew this: they hadn't all been poisonous. Hadn't I eaten a piece myself without effect?

"You know what this means?" Nola said.

SURE, I knew. It meant that Gurney had been out to Longview and had cased Mrs. Schubert's room. If I managed it he certainly could. That was his business. Gurney had a sweet tooth and if he saw the candy he undoubtedly sampled a couple of pieces.

I told that to Nola, adding: "And the chances are he died right there at the estate."

"Exactly." Nola was tightly grim. "They hid the body and then when the thing got stirred up they were afraid it would be discovered so they delivered it to your place."

"Right. Those birds are up to something and I think I know what it is."

"I'm listening," Nola said.

"That candy was in a bureau in Mrs. Schubert's room, so we can assume she ate some of it and died—"

"They say she took a trip."

"She did. Across the River Jordan."

"But they never reported it."

"That's the gimmick," I said. "They had a better idea. Mrs. Schubert was the beneficiary of a large annuity policy. If they kept her death a secret the company would continue to send annuity payments. By forging indorsements they could collect. They had samples of her handwriting and they traced over it."

Nola swore. "I think you hit it."

"And the same probably holds for Mrs. Walker—the other old lady. My guess is that she died too and they've got the body buried somewhere. But when this inquiry started they didn't want too many questions asked, so they simply said both old ladies took a trip. Nobody saw either of them leave the home. I talked to one of the guests and her story sounded fishy. So it isn't the first time Pristine and Varney pulled this stunt."

"Ingenious," Nola said.

"I agree. But when Miss Stanton appeared and began making inquiries it got their wind up. They began to sweat. The story about Florida was the best they could cook up under the circumstances."

"You say that box of chocolates is still in her room?"

"It was when I left."

"I'll take the Emergency Squad out there. They'll think an earthquake hit them."

"Don't forget a court order."

"I'll have one in an hour. Coming along?"

I begged off. "Not me. What I need is a week in bed."

Nola said good-by and cut the connection. In less than thirty seconds things would begin popping around headquarters. Mr. Adam Pristine and Dr. Charles Varney were going to find themselves stewing in a pot of boiling trouble.

They had it coming, the damn grave robbers!

I had no sympathy to waste there.

I wandered out to the reception room and spoke to the intern.

"Sorry," he said. "You can't talk to the girl. She's in no condition to see anyone." An idea brightened his face. "You're a friend of the fam-

ily, why don't you notify the husband?"

I didn't need him to suggest it. It was something that had been growing in my mind. But first I stopped off at the office. I made a lot of noise opening the door and then I leaped aside. Nobody jumped me. Nobody cut loose with a blast from a shotgun. But I still wasn't taking any chances. I sneaked a hand around the doorjamb and snapped the light button.

The place was deserted. I did what had to be done and tightened the makeshift sling around my arm. Then I went down and flagged a cab.

THE Revere was an apartment hotel that sent an acre of limestone rising into the clouds. The lobby was dim and cool and the elevator was built of polished Philippine mahogany. It lifted me with the smooth buoyancy of a helium balloon and I went down the hall and found Leising's door.

He was surprised to see me. His face had the drawn look of a man who's been up carousing all night. The chaotic state of the apartment said it had been quite a brawl. Empty bottles were strewn about and the skeleton of a roast turkey lay on a platter.

"St. John," he said, reaching for my good hand. "Glad to see you. Damn glad." Concern clouded his eyes. "What the devil happened to your arm?"

"I broke it cranking an old lady's flivver," I said, and swept a glance around the room, lifting my eyebrows. "I thought you didn't know many people in New York."

He smiled. "I thought we ought to have a party, so I invited everyone at the office." He sighed wearily. "Just got back from there."

"I have some bad news," I said.

"Bad news?" He was watching me attentively.

"Your wife had an accident."

His face went pale. "Accident? Is she—is she . . . ?"

"No," I said. "She's not dead. She'll be all right."

He emptied his lungs with relief. "What happened?"

"She ate some poison."

His eyes were round with astonishment. His voice came out high-pitched, unreal. "Poison! Good Lord! Where? When?"

"In my apartment," I said. "This afternoon."

His eyes were stuck on mine in a sort of queer fascination. "I—I don't understand."

"She ate some chocolates filled with arsenic," I explained.

His legs weakened enough to make him sit down. Incredulity joined the astonishment on his face. He moved the tip of his tongue slowly along his upper lip. His Adam's apple quivered as the words came out thickly.

"You poisoned her?"

"It was an accident," I said. "I didn't know there was arsenic in the chocolates. I found the box in Mrs. Schubert's room at Longview."

He struggled upright, clutching at my arm. "Where is she? What hospital? I must go to her."

"Later," I said. "You can't see her now, they won't permit visitors. She's too ill."

His eyes searched for a bottle and found one with about two fingers of rye left at the bottom and he tipped it against his teeth and swallowed, putting some color back into his face.

"St. John," he said, with his fists tight along the seams of his pants, "I don't understand. I'm confused. What is this about Mrs. Schubert and a box of poisoned chocolates?"

He had reason to be confused. I knew why, too.

I SAID, "Somebody sent her a box of chocolates. The filling was something the confectioner never put there. Arsenic. Shot into the centers with a hypodermic needle. It's a common poison that's available to anyone. It's used in rat biscuits, roach paste, fly paper, and paris

green. With a little ingenuity it can be extracted from any of those products. It's mortal stuff, one of the metallic poisons."

"Incredible," he muttered. "Damned incredible." He met my eyes. "Then the old lady must be dead."

"No doubt about that."

He flung his arms wide in a gesture of bafflement. "But I understood she went to Florida. Why did they say that?"

"They were lying. They didn't want anybody to find her."

"If she didn't go to Florida, then where is she? That's what I want to know."

"Her body," I said, "is hidden on the premises somewhere at Longview."

He looked bewildered. "I don't get it, St. John. What were they after?"

"Money. By concealing the fact of her death they could keep collecting her annuity payments for a couple of years. It was an old stunt of theirs. And for them it was easy. They selected old women, preferably without relatives who might become nosy. I don't believe they ever killed anyone, but when the women died they had a perfect setup for an insurance fraud.

"They would hide the bodies out there on the island and then, after they collected for a couple of years, they would declare the women dead. Varney, after all, was a doctor and could sign his own death certificates."

"You don't believe they killed Mrs. Schubert?"

"Hardly. If they were guilty they wouldn't leave that box of chocolates lying around. They didn't even know it was poisoned."

"You have something there," he said, nodding thoughtfully.

I didn't need him to tell me.

"And Fay didn't send it to her either," I said. "She wouldn't kill her own aunt. And besides, she ate some of the candy even after I told her where it came from."

"Then who?"

As if he didn't know.

"Well," I said, "who else had anything to gain by Mrs. Schubert's death? Fay inherits the balance of her aunt's estate and that money practically became yours when you married her."

I got a lumpy smile and an upraised eyebrow. "So you think I sent her the chocolates?" he asked softly.

"That's right," I said.

"How about your detective friend —Steve Gurney? Did I kill him too?"

"Indirectly, yes. He ate some of those chocolates too."

THE smile died and Leising's mouth became a pinched ring of white skin. He took two crablike steps backward, watching me carefully.

"Tell me, St. John, did I also hide Gurney's body so nobody could find it?"

"No. Pristine and Varney did that. The poison must have taken effect while Gurney was searching the place. They found him and were reluctant to turn in a report. The one thing they could not afford was an investigation. They didn't want any cops out there prying around. That had to be avoided at all costs. So they hid the body until they could decide what to do with it."

A nerve jumped in Leising's cheek. "What about the hand?"

"That was your idea," I said. "A real beaut, too. You had sent the chocolates to Mrs. Schubert, but nothing happened. No announcement was made of her death. Maybe you tried to contact her by phone and got a brushoff. You grew suspicious. So you sneaked out there and began to nose around. That wasn't too hard. Those birds aren't professional criminals. They thought a watchdog was all they needed. Besides, they couldn't take too many precautions. They wanted everything to keep looking normal. So you found Gurney's body,

probably in the cellar. You didn't know what had killed him, but now you were sure there was knavery afoot.

"That's when you got the idea to cut off Gurney's hand and plant it on me. It would do three things. It would intensify the investigation, it would bring Mrs. Schubert's death to light, and it would hang both killings on Pristine and Varney. Then you'd be in the clear, with nothing to do but spend the money."

Malcolm Leising's mouth had stretched down at the corners. Nerve tension sharpened his features. He stood there, not moving.

I wound it up for him. "I missed the first clue," I said, "when the doctor gave himself away. He told me that Mrs. Schubert was a stubborn old lady. *Was* not *is*. Get it? That meant the old lady was already dead. They were really stewed up, that pair. They played right into your hands. They thought they were being clever by dumping Gurney in my apartment while I was at the home last night unconscious."

I thought: Finding Gurney mutilated was why they got panicky when I arrived, and didn't want me to look around.

He shook his head. "None of this can be proved," he said.

He knew damned well it could. He just wanted to know what loose ends needed tying up.

I laughed shortly. "Proof? How's this for proof? Your prints on the candy box and on Gurney's clothing. The hypodermic needle they'll find in your apartment. The source of your arsenic. Motive. Opportunity. A web of circumstantial evidence that—"

He didn't wait to hear more. He believed me. He whirled and was plunging toward the door when I dropped the gun along my sling into my hand and shot him twice in the right leg. That was why I had stopped off at the office—to get the gun.

Two shots. One for Steve Gurney and one for Mrs. Schubert. Maybe I should have aimed higher, but the law would take care of that.

He looked up at me from the floor, hugging his leg. If looks could kill I'd have been laid out stiff right there.

I said, "Fay will probably stick by you. She's that kind of a girl. Blind with loyalty. But she'll forget and in the end she'll be better off."

I hoped so. I hoped I could make her forget.

Be Glad You're Not . . .

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We Die and Learn

He planned to kill two birds with one stone—with an alibi that was murder!

His hands leaped out, fingers tightening savagely.

By Ray Lopez

JEFF NASH was standing in the doorway of his office listening to Sharleen sing her songs when the phone rang. He didn't mind the interruption too much. He had given Sharleen the singing spot to keep her amused, and the patrons didn't mind what they heard so long as they could look. But Sharleen was no Peggy Lee. It was no sacrifice for Jeff to close the door and shut out that heavy, unmusical voice.

He picked up the phone and said, "Yes?"

"It's me."

Another unmusical voice. This one was soft, like the whisper of an animal moving through dry leaves. Vonchek.

Jeff quickly switched the phone from his right ear to his left. "You're back."

"Yeah. See you tomorrow night. Regular time."

"Good. You'll have something with you?" Jeff asked.

"Not as much as you been getting."

"Why? What went wrong?"

"Nothing went wrong. Good haul. I just figure a guy who sits in an office taking no chances don't deserve the big cut."

Jeff paused. Here it was. The beginning of the gouge. Not that he was surprised, of course. Keeping agreements wasn't the sort of thing you could look for from a dope runner.

"I'll talk to you about it," he said carefully.

"Don't lose any sleep. It's still worth your while." The phone clicked.

Jeff hung up slowly. Vonchek's last words hadn't fooled him. Yes, it was still worth his while. Maybe Vonchek would leave things that way a couple of months more. But the pattern was clear now. Smaller and smaller cut. Then no cut at all. Then, inevitably, Vonchek would begin to blackmail him.

JEFF settled his big frame into his desk chair and frowned as he cut the end from a Partagas cigar. Good Havanas were one of his few luxuries. Sharleen was another, but of course that was a different setup. Sharleen was the reason for all this. It was because of her that he had thrown a big chunk of his money into the dope syndicate Vonchek controlled. Vonchek had promised a fast return with no risk. He had also promised that nobody else would know of Jeff's connection.

Jeff lit the cigar and thought of Vonchek. The little man was too smart to make his blackmail play yet. He had warned Jeff of what was coming. In a few weeks he would tighten the screws a little more.

Except that there wouldn't be any Vonchek in a few weeks. Jeff had already made up his mind to kill him the next night.

Jeff Nash was a business man. He played the angles, and covered himself at every move. His five years as a professional fighter had given him his start and he had saved every cent he earned. It had been good business to give up fighting when he learned definitely that he would never be top-flight caliber. It had been good business to invest part of his winnings in the purchase of the Club Rendezvous, and a larger portion with Vonchek for the big, quick turnover.

He was glad Vonchek had picked this time to throw the harpoon. He had known from the beginning that he would have to kill Vonchek eventually, after he had served his purpose. Again, it was good business to slough a partner when he ceased to be useful. The little man with the whispering voice had merely helped by picking the time and the place.

There was a gentle tap and the head waiter came in. "You told me to let you know if Al Moody showed up around here any more. He's here tonight."

Jeff's shoe kicked at his desk and a chip of veneer fell to the floor. "That rabbit," he said savagely. "Okay. Leave the door open."

Sharleen was singing *Bill* and trying hard to sound like the Helen Morgan record she played a dozen times a day. Jeff didn't like sloppy sentiment anyway, and he particularly hated it from the cold, poker-playing type like Sharleen. She could cry herself dry at a Bette Davis picture, but she had tossed Al Moody aside like a stale loaf of bread the minute Jeff had waved the right kind of presents under her nose.

Jeff kicked the desk drawer again

and this time it banged shut. Al Moody, a runt managing a neighborhood movie theater. And he still had the gall to come crawling here to the Rendezvous so he could see Sharleen, a year after she had walked out on him.

Sharleen's song ended on a high, strident note. Jeff went out into the club and met her as she was leaving the floor. Her hair was the color of a sunset on a hot summer afternoon and her lips were full and crimson. She was wearing the sapphire evening dress tonight, the one Jeff had paid a hundred and fifty for. It molded her soft young body like a coat of paint.

"You didn't hear my song, darling," she accused.

"I heard it," Jeff said. Sharleen was a tall girl but Jeff had boxed with the light-heavies and he topped her by a good five inches. "Friend of yours is here again tonight," he added.

Sharleen's smile faltered. "Al?"

"So I hear."

She looked around the club nervously. "The other side," Jeff said coldly. "Table forty. Against the wall. As if you didn't know."

"Why should I know?" she flared.

"You knew, angel. Let's go pay him a visit."

Fear crept into her eyes. "Now, Jeff, please don't start anything. I can't keep the guy from coming here if he wants to—"

Jeff's fingers tightened like bands of steel around her arm and the pain made her cringe into silence. He guided her through the closely packed tables and his wide, flat face was grim as they approached table forty. The slender, balding man who sat there alone looked up and paled.

"Hello, Nash," he said unsteadily. He was too nervous to look at the girl.

"I thought I made it clear you weren't welcome here," Jeff said.

Al Moody was frightened but he held his ground. "You have no right to keep me away, Nash. I'm not causing any trouble."

"You're sure as hell asking for some."

"Jeff, turn it off!" Sharleen's voice was low and urgent. "People are staring at us."

SHE was right, and it made Jeff more angry. If Al Moody had been a legitimate rival, that would have been far more simple. But Moody was almost fifty pounds lighter than Jeff and slender as a matchstick. His dog-like adoration of Sharleen was ridiculous, and it was proving highly embarrassing.

"Look," Jeff said. "Do yourself a favor. Stick to running that movie house of yours. You're not wanted at the Rendezvous."

"Why don't you let Sharleen tell me that?"

Somebody at the next table laughed. Jeff felt his face getting hot. It was like a kid thumbing his nose at a larger boy because he knows he won't be hit back.

"Beat it," he said savagely. "I've had all of this I intend to take. And if you think I'm bluffing, don't try calling me on it. You won't like what happens."

He strode back to his office, conscious of the grins which followed him. He was sore at Al Moody and just as sore at himself, for letting his temper get away from him. He had come this far up the ladder because he had always carefully suppressed such emotions as anger and annoyance. But this Moody thing was getting under his skin and he realized it.

He left the club and drove home alone. The brisk night air whipping in the car window reminded him that he had better forget about Al Moody and start thinking of the real problem at hand. The next night at two o'clock he was due to meet Vonchek and pocket a sizeable hunk of cash. Vonchek had to be killed at that meeting. And an alibi, a tight alibi, had to be set up in advance.

Jeff calmed down and drove more

slowly, thinking. Supposedly, Vonchek had never let Jeff's name be known to anyone, not even his partners in the dope deal. Maybe there was no need for an alibi, since the police investigation might find no arrows at all pointing in Jeff's direction. *Maybe.*

But Jeff hadn't reached his present position by dealing in maybes. He certainly didn't intend to start now, especially when the setup involved murder. The only smart way to play the hand would be to assume that Vonchek *had* left some sort of an arrow pointing his way, then proceed to protect himself from there on.

That would be messy, of course, being connected in any way with a dope-running outfit. He hoped it wouldn't happen, and he didn't think it would. But he intended to make certain that if such a charge did reach out for him, at least it wouldn't mushroom into a murder rap as well.

He arrived at his modest home in the suburbs and garaged the car. He let himself in the front door and paused, a faint smile on his lips. From down in the cellar he could hear Waldo punching the heavy bag. The dumb snowbird was coked up again.

Jeff went downstairs. He had set up a gymnasium in the cellar, partly because he liked to work out himself and partly to keep Waldo happy. Keeping Waldo happy was important.

HE WATCHED contemptuously as the big man lumbered around the heavy bag, pounding it hard and uttering meaningless sounds in a thick, guttural voice. Waldo had been a fighter too, a club fighter who had stayed in the game just long enough to have all the intelligence banged out of him.

Jeff had taken him in, but not for sweet charity's sake. On the contrary, Waldo was one of the soundest of all of Jeff's business investments. A few bucks now and then, enough snow to keep him happy, and Waldo would do anything in the world Jeff asked him to.

"Hey, champ," Jeff called.

The big pug didn't hear him. He kept punishing the bag until Jeff grabbed it and swung it away from him. Still it took a few seconds for the glazed look to leave Waldo's eyes.

"Hello, Jeff," he said at last, and grinned.

Jeff didn't answer, because a thought had just come to him. He looked at Waldo, standing there on his heels like a clumsily made statue, and he had his alibi for the next night. The plan was so neat he almost laughed aloud. It would spot him miles away from the place where he planned to kill Vonchek—and it would serve another purpose at the same time by scaring the daylights out of Al Moody.

"Get some sleep, big shot," he said. "I've got a job I want you to do for me tomorrow night."

"Sure." The big man wagged his head slowly. "I do anything at all for you, Jeff. You treat me swell."

He lumbered obediently to the sagging army cot in the corner and stretched his big frame on it. He was asleep in a matter of seconds. Jeff shivered in the dampness of the cellar. He often wondered how a man could live down here without picking up pneumonia. But he had never worried about it. Any time Waldo did get sick he could always dump him in a charity ward at some hospital and forget about him. The big oaf would probably thank him for doing it.

THE next night was Saturday and the Rendezvous was jammed. Jeff checked over the take for the first half of the evening and he liked what he saw. Vonchek had really done him a favor, forcing him to take action now. He had a going business in the club, and the dope racket had given him a sweet nest egg which he could always fall back on when things got tough. It was the perfect moment for him to burn his bridges behind him

and go entirely legitimate from here on.

Sharleen and Waldo were in the office with him. Sharleen sat on the corner of his desk while Jeff worked. She was still nervous over Jeff's beef with Al Moody the night before, and she was burning her way through a cigarette as she waited to go on with her late performance.

"That all you can think about?" She snapped. "Just business? Don't I count any more?"

Jeff looked up and smiled. "Calm down, angel. You know I have to keep tabs on how things are going."

"Sure, I know." She mashed out the cigarette and stared at Waldo. "What did you bring that poor goof around for?"

"Waldo's all right," Jeff said.

The big man's head moved ponderously. "Sure," he muttered. "I'm okay."

Sharleen looked accusingly at Jeff. "He's full of snow again. Honest, it's a crime to treat a poor punchy the way you treat him—"

"Don't say that." Waldo's mouth was open, his eyes staring at her. "Don't say anything bad about Jeff. He's a great guy. He treats me great."

"Satisfied?" Jeff mocked.

Sharleen swept out of the room. A few minutes later the orchestra blared a fanfare. It was one-thirty. Jeff closed the door and turned to Waldo.

"I told you I had something for you to do tonight," he said, speaking slowly and clearly. "Now listen carefully so you'll remember everything I say."

Waldo's forehead creased with the effort of concentration. It was funny, in a way, Jeff thought. Like the exaggerated scowl on a character in a comic strip who is supposed to be thinking. But there was nothing funny about what had to be done tonight, or Waldo's part in it.

"You know Al Moody?" Jeff said. "The little guy Sharleen used to run around with?"

Waldo nodded.

"I'm sore as hell at him," Jeff said. "He's been hanging around Sharleen too much. I want to scare him a little, teach him a lesson."

"Sure," Waldo mumbled.

"Now get this straight, Waldo, because it's important. Moody runs the Elm Street theater. This being Saturday, he has a late show, so he won't get away until two o'clock."

The big man nodded. "He parks his car in the lot behind the theater," Jeff said. "The lights are out at two in the morning and his car is usually the only one there that late. It's a perfect setup for us."

"Perfect setup," the fighter echoed.

"What I want," Jeff said slowly, "is for you to hide in that lot and jump on Moody when he comes out. Rough him up a little. Not too much, but just enough to scare him. Get him from behind so he won't see who you are. That's important."

"Yeah. I got it."

"Then," Jeff said, "I want you to go over to the beanery across the street from the theater. It's an all-night joint. Tell the people in there that *I* had a fight with Moody and beat it right afterwards."

The puzzled look was slow in coming, but it did come. "I tell people *you* had a fight? How come, Jeff?"

"Because I want to give Moody a scare," Jeff explained patiently. "I want him to think it was me who beat him up, so he'll stay away from Sharleen from now on. Understand?"

A crooked grin split the pug's face. "I get it, Jeff. You want me to tell them people in the beanery—"

"Tell them I was sore at Moody for what he's trying to pull with Sharleen. Tell them I said he got what was coming to him. Understand?"

"Yeth. I understand."

"That will do it," Jeff said. "You and the others from the diner can go take care of Moody. I don't want him really hurt, see, just scared. Then he'll stay away from Sharleen and I can comb him out of my hair."

"I get you, Jeff." Waldo crouched in a fighter's position and his feet shuffled heavily.

"Let's go, champ," Jeff said.

HE DROVE to the back entrance of the theater. It was past one-thirty and only a single car remained in the lot. Al Moody's car.

"See you back at the club in an hour or so," Jeff said, and left the big man standing there.

He turned on to the through highway and poured on the speed. He had just short of an hour now to do what had to be done. Voncheck would be waiting for him in a deserted section of woods, ten miles from town. He would be alone. The road leading to the spot was paved, so that even the tire-marks element would be no factor. And Jeff was not carrying a gun.

Vonchek's battered car was there ahead of him. Jeff stopped and got out. The little man stepped forward.

"Here," he said.

The envelope was a plain one. Jeff opened it and counted enough of the money to be sure the roll wasn't padded.

"So you're starting to rat on me," he said, putting the envelope in his inside pocket.

"Nobody's rattin'." That whispering voice gave Jeff the creeps. "It just don't figure. You sit back, we do the job."

"So the cut is smaller."

"Next time it's smaller than this."

Jeff moved. His hands leaped out and fingers strengthened by years of training tightened around Vonchek's throat.

Frightened hands clutched at Jeff's grip, clawed at his wrists. Vonchek stared up at him through eyes that were much too large. Jeff shook the frail body like a rodent throttling a snake. Vonchek's feet thrashed, then went limp.

Jeff dropped the lifeless form and it curled to the ground. He searched the body but found nothing more than a few dollars in cash. He didn't touch it. Two minutes later he was back on the main highway heading for town once again.

A strange feeling of exaltation raged inside him like a fever. He was clear now. Vonchek had served his purpose, and now Vonchek couldn't point any fingers at him. Jeff had been sure from the little man's attitude that he hadn't been expecting anything like this. The chances were a thousand to one that he hadn't covered himself.

Jeff smiled. That was the difference between a petty crook and a business man. It was why Jeff was alive now and Vonchek was dead.

He was back at the club at two-thirty. He was still smiling as he opened the door of his office. Then he stopped short.

Waldo was there. So was Sharleen. And with them two other men. Detectives.

JEFF was startled momentarily but he recovered. Naturally they would be making a routine checkup of a fist fight. They probably wanted to know why he had driven away and left Al Moody lying out in the lot. They'd probably bawl him out plenty, and maybe Moody would even sue him for damages.

But that was no cause for worry. The more interest they centered on a supposed battle between himself and Al Moody, the cleaner he'd be on the murder he had just committed.

Jeff could tell from Waldo's foolish smile that the big pug had carried out his orders. One of the cops, a pasty-faced lieutenant named Yeatman, said:

"Hello, Nash. Where've you been?"

"Riding around trying to cool off," Jeff said. "Why?"

"Seen Al Moody in the past hour?"

Jeff took a deep breath. He hoped it would sound convincing. "Yeah, I saw him. Is that what you're here about?"

"That's what."

He shrugged. "I lost my temper.

The guy's been a nuisance recently. I got fed up. I guess you know why."

"Yeah. Sharleen's told us."

The girl was staring at Jeff bleakly. He felt better. This was working out perfectly, all the way around. He had been afraid at first that a snowbird like Waldo might get his signals crossed. But apparently he hadn't. He was grateful to Waldo. He might slip him a ten spot later on.

The phone jangled and Yeatman answered. He said, "That's right," and then listened for a long time. Finally he said, "Okay, thanks." And he hung up.

He looked at Jeff. "Al Moody is dead," he said.

The smile remained on Jeff's face but the humor went out of it. His cheekbones seemed to have turned to powder so that his face had no shape.

"Dead!" he gasped.

"That can't surprise you very much," the other cop said. "Nobody but a professional fighter like you could have given a man that kind of a beating."

Jeff fought to make his mind function. He stared at Waldo. The big pug was rocking on his heels, still coked. Jeff went sick inside as he realized what must have happened. He remembered how Waldo had been pounding the heavy bag last night, lost in his own garbled thoughts. It had been a job to get through to him, make him stop punishing that bag once he was started. The same thing must have happened tonight, and this time Jeff hadn't been around to pull him away from Al Moody before it was too late.

Yeatman's voice droned on. "Waldo tipped us off. He came into the diner across the street from the theater, after you left. Said you had had a beef with Moody over Sharleen. You're in trouble, Nash. People right here in the club heard you threaten him only last night."

"That was no threat." Jeff found his voice and talked fast, desperately. "I was just a little burned up, that's all. Good Lord, I had no reason to kill the guy."

"That ain't the way I heard it, chum."

JEFF reached for a loophole and found it. Obviously, he couldn't claim now that it was a plant. He couldn't tell them Waldo had done the job so that he himself could go kill another man ten miles out of town.

But there was a way out. It meant serving time, but maybe only a few years. "Okay, so the guy's dead," he said. "I didn't have any idea, but . . . he's dead. I'll admit that. I'll take a manslaughter rap, if that's what you want me to say—"

"Not manslaughter, kid. First degree murder."

Jeff's mouth fell open. "First degree! Hell, it was just a fight! There was nothing premeditated about it."

"Sure there was, son. You planned it all out. Tried to make it look like just a regular beef, but you had your motive. You had it from twenty minutes of two."

"What the devil happened at twenty minutes of two?"

"Sharleen left this note on your desk," Yeatman said, and handed Jeff a slip of paper.

Jeff's fingers let it fall to the floor and he had to stoop and pick it up. He felt Sharleen's eyes burning into him. His shirt was damp with sweat. He tried to focus on the words:

Jeff—

I'm sick and tired of your jealousy and I'm sick and tired of you. I'm leaving town with Al tonight, and if I never see you again that will be great with me. At least Al really loves me, and that's more than you ever did. So long, sucker.

Sharleen.

The corny songs she liked to sing. The Helen Morgan stuff. The Bette Davis pictures. *At least Al really loves me. . . .*

(Continued on page 37)

Ghost in the Gallery

By
Joseph Commings

It was almost as if he were something out of this world — for no ordinary mortal could vanish thus into thin air!

THAT afternoon Linda Carewe poisoned her husband. She poisoned him with arsenic.

As an afternoon, it was a rainy, dreary one in late fall. The downpour made the Honeywell Art Galleries gleam in the wet like a dark green marble tomb.

Linda Carewe stumbled inside with a throbbing heart right past McPherson, the front door attendant. Mc-

Pherson stopped talking to the newsboy with his sodden bundle of papers and stared into the gloomy interior after her.

She was wearing a black plastic raincoat and Russian boots. Her folded, dripping transparent umbrella was squeezed in her pale hand. Later when Senator Banner was investigating the murder, he described her as having a fascinating frame and a head full of brown follow-me-lad curls. Her eyes, as long as an Egyptian queen's, darted with fright.

Borden Argyll was waiting for her in their usual nook. He was an anemic artist with tortoise shell glasses and a scrubbed face. But he was young. That was all that mattered to Linda.

When she saw him she went to pieces emotionally. He raised his arms too slowly as she rushed into them and she caught him full on the narrow chest, almost knocking him backward into the T'ang Dynasty vase.

"I killed him!" she sobbed. "I'm rid of him, Borden! I did! I did!"

He jerked his head around to see if anybody was within earshot. There was no one else there at all. At that moment he was as near to panic as he had ever been in his life.

IT HAD all started eight months ago when Linda married DeWitt Carewe. The marriage was the culmination of a hasty romance that began in the woods four months before. It had been a gusty day when they'd met. The earth and the sky had the same unnatural, lurid glow. And Linda, out for a Sunday stroll, was lost. A man appeared suddenly on the path. The wild wind in the trees seemed to shout and try to tell her things to warn her.

The man showed her the way back to the bus line. As they walked, they talked. Linda became intrigued by DeWitt Carewe. There was not too great a difference between their ages. He looked about forty and she was twenty-three. And he had money. In finance he led Wall Street by the nose. Where others failed, he begot riches. He had inhuman drive.

She married him.

There were whisperings about Carewe. Whisperings about his connection with unspeakable things that went on behind certain locked doors in Washington Square. Things that had to do with werewolves and vampirism. Some people even went so far as to say that Linda had married Lucifer himself.

During the last three months Linda had repeatedly and incautiously fled to someone "more human"—Borden Argyll. She had been introduced to Argyll by Carewe himself. Argyll, a laborious workman with the brush, had been using Carewe as a subject in one of his art series called *Studies in the Supernormal*. Aside from going with another man's wife, smoking a calabash, and matching pennies, Argyll had few vices.

Now in the dim, dreary gallery he tried to console Linda. Bit by bit, she told him about the noon meal and the five grains of arsenic in the milk and how she had hurried out of the house after she'd seen him drink it. She couldn't witness his death agony.

"He was a monster," muttered Argyll. "I realize that now." The tattoo of the rain on the stained glass window blurred their voices. "But, sweetheart, what shall we do? The police will find—" The tortured look on her face at the mention of police made him hesitate.

Neither of them wanted to think about the police. And they clung to each other quivering with doubt and apprehension in the long shadowy gallery.

Someone was walking toward them. Walking with a slow tantalizing deliberate tread. They both turned their heads in that direction to see who was coming.

Out of the streaming gray light leered a triangular face. A full-lipped mouth was drawn back exposing sharp animal teeth in a cruel grin.

Linda made a sound as if she'd been struck.

Argyll gasped, "Carewe!"

"My dear sweet wife"—the voice sounded sepulchral—"murdered me this noon. Do you believe in ghosts, Argyll?"

Argyll was lead-colored. But he stood his ground. "No, damn you! You're alive!"

"Follow me and see—if you dare!" came the taunt.

The apparition wheeled and went back rapidly the way he had come.

Linda stared dazedly at Argyll. "Then I didn't—"

He reached for her hand. "No, you didn't poison him. Come on. We'll follow him."

"Oh no, Borden. No. He's up to something terrible. You don't know him as I do."

"We'll be careful," he urged.

They started off blindly, trailing Carewe to the first elbow of the deserted gallery. As they turned the corner, they saw the flitting form mingling with the shadows a good distance ahead.

The whole building was deadly still save for their footsteps, their quick breathing, and the steady rain.

The man ahead had whisked around the next corner. They heard his footfalls break into a sharp run. They heard the opening and closing of a glass door.

On the wall near them a small sign with gilt lettering and an arrow said: *Administrative Offices.*

Argyll drew cautiously to the turn around which Carewe had vanished. Linda panted on his collar. They halted.

NOW they could see down the next wide hall and across it as far as the first office door, which was marked: *Trustees.* It was diagonally fifteen feet from the corner where they stood. The closed door was, except for its wooden frame, sheer plate glass. They could look clearly into the room.

They saw a lighted floor lamp set to the left and rear. Standing beside the lamp, grinning out at them, was Carewe. They saw him reach out his arm and yank the lamp chain. The room and the hall became one vast shadow.

Argyll fumbled for a box of wooden matches and struck one. He took a step toward the Trustees' office door.

Linda caught him restrainingly by the arm. "No, Borden! Don't go in!"

"Please, Linda!" he snapped, nerves ragged. "Let's get this nonsense over with."

She let go. Like a will o' the wisp, he crossed the space in a half dozen strides. The doorknob rattled loosely in his fingers and he swung the door open.

"Don't come in, Linda," he warned her over his shoulder.

The same match in his hand was still burning when he groped for the lamp chain. His hand brushed against the bulb. It was warm. He found the chain and jerked it. Flinging away the twisted black match stump, he swung around. His arms were upraised, half protectingly.

He saw Linda standing squarely in the office doorway. He saw—*nobody else!*

Carewe had vanished with the turning out of the light!

Then Linda's rasping intake of breath made the short hairs at the nape of Argyll's neck bristle. He peered around the edge of a maple desk to where she was pointing.

A girl's body was spilled there. Her skull had been crushed with one blow of the silver statuette that was lying by her. The statuette was an Inca alpaca and its long neck made an ideal handle.

You could almost hear the thump of their hearts in the still room. Argyll recognized whose body it was. "Phyllis Remington!"

"Your model!"

He touched the girl's hand. It was warm and limp. She had just been killed.

Linda heard a movement in the hall behind her. She made one terrified leap to Argyll's side.

In the doorway appeared a roly-poly little man with a baldish head and gleaming eyeglasses on a wide black ribbon. He wore striped pants and what Senator Banner called a come-to-prayer coat. As he stood there poised, his legs bent backward at the knees like sabres. He was George Honeywell, founder and director of the Galleries. His wrinkled forehead proclaimed that he was a worrier. And his chief worry was for more money for the upkeep of the Galleries.

He tittered. "Mrs. Carewe! Whatever has happened to you? You're as pale as a—"

"My husband!" she blurted, on the verge of hysteria. "He's mad! He was just in here! He killed Phyllis!"

"Good Lord, no!" Honeywell's jaw fell slack as he hastened to their side at the desk. He looked down, then away, biting his trembling lip. "What a loss. She was such a beautiful girl. A trifle tempestuous perhaps, but—Where is Carewe?"

"He disappeared," said Argyll. "I know it sounds incredible but he vanished into thin air before I could get in. Maybe you've seen him."

"Me?" said Honeywell. "Lord, no. I've been in the other office across the hall ever since coming back from a Judo lesson. Nobody came my way."

They looked around the square room. There were no windows. It was air-conditioned. The door was the only opening.

Argyll's eyes rose to the nearly life-size painting hanging flush with the back wall. It was one of his own recent works. It was a vividly realistic subject called *Werewolf and Victim*. In the shaggy face of the pawing werewolf, with its prominent incisors and lancet canines, no one could fail to recognize DeWitt Carewe.

Argyll had used Carewe and Phyllis Remington as his models.

Honeywell shook himself like a wet poodle. "Wait for me in the Seventeenth Century Gallery while I phone the police," he said. "We've got to stick together."

IT WAS hours after the discovery of the murder. Linda and Honeywell huddled outside the phone booth in the drugstore while Argyll, inside, dialed.

Argyll, half listening to the buzz in the receiver, was saying to them, "While Senator Banner was sitting for the oil I made of him during his last political campaign, he talked a blue streak about impossible murders. He must have cited at least four cases he's solved where a person left a room *unseen* through a watched door. The answer to each one was a simple magic trick. There was nothing supernatural about it."

Linda said tremulously, "DeWitt is capable of anything evil. Anything."

Argyll spoke into the phone. "Ninety-one Morningside Drive? I want to speak to Senator Banner. Is he home?"

The switchboard girl said, "No, he isn't, sir. Have you tried the Sphinx Club? He's probably playing bezique there, or pulling rabbits out of hats. This's one of his nights."

Argyll called the Sphinx Club on Fifth Avenue. The desk clerk said, "He hasn't been in tonight, sir. He may be banging away at clay geese at the shooting gallery on Broadway and 42nd Street. That's one of his hangouts."

Argyll called the shooting gallery. A beery voice said, "The Senator? He looked in while passin' and said somethin' about goin' to a bowling alley." The voice broke off while someone in the background did some coaching. Then the beery voice resumed. "Beg poddin! You'll catch him at Shell's Billiard Parlor playin' snooker."

United States Senator Brooks U. Banner could not have been more at home in Shell's Billiard Parlor if they

had built the place around him. Cue in hand, he was bending his girth over a pool table, studying the layout of the balls. The cuffs of his peppermint-striped shirt were folded up and his red Hercules suspenders made a blazing crisscross on a back as wide as a cement sidewalk.

He was playing a thin, dark, nervous man with eyes like a blacksnake's. The dark man agitatedly chalked a cue, watching Banner.

Argyll, rain dripping off his hat brim, led Linda and Honeywell through the smokiness and chatter of the pool room. Some of the men whistled approval at Linda and that made Banner abandon the game for a moment to turn around for a look-see.

Linda got the full impact of his blue watered-steel eyes. He knew that to her he looked like a slovenly archangel who enjoyed consorting with blackguards. He was a King Kong in size with a mop of grizzled hair and black-lead eyebrows. His string tie looked greasy, as if it had trailed in his soup. And it had.

Banner's eyes stabbed away from her and at the others. "Borden Argyll!" He held out a palm the size of a welcome mat. "Howzit, paint-slubber? How're all the paintings?"

Argyll shook hands and introduced his companions. "We came to see you, Senator," he said hesitantly, "about the murder."

Banner shuffled with interest, like a performing bear. "What murder?"

Linda started to say, "The ghost in the gallery—"

"Jumping hop-toads! *That* one! I read the headlines. That's all I looked at. Wait'll I finish off this game."

Briskly calling his shots, he pocketed one red ball, then a pool ball. His dark opponent stopped chalking his cue. Banner pocketed another red ball, another pool ball. The dark man, disgruntled, put his cue back in the rack. He couldn't bear to look at the table as the last ball rolled out of sight.

Banner wet his big thumb and counted his winnings, a sheaf of red seal U.S. notes. Then he struggled into his antique frock coat and grinned.

"He doesn't know I'm an international pool shark. We'll all go to the Sphinx Club. You're my guests. I want to feed the elephant—meaning, yours truly. Then we'll talk about the murder."

BANNER, waving at everybody, selected a table in the center of the dining room. He ordered one of his favorite rare Spencer steaks and a scuttle of black coffee. "Make the dessert a rhubarb meringue pie."

The others said they had already dined at the rotisserie. But they ordered drinks. Banner attacked his feast as if it were Fido's dinner; he cut the whole steak into small chunks, salted his string beans, stuccoed a whole potato with butter, and buried everything under a volcanic eruption of gravy.

Argyll cleared his throat. "We three have been together ever since we discovered the murder."

Banner lifted a plastered fork to his mouth. "Sail into this easier lad. I'm gonna be quiz master in a game of cross questions and crooked answers. First off, in what order did you people go into the Galleries?"

Honeywell said, "McPherson, the man at the front door, tells us that I was the first one in this afternoon, then came Phyllis Remington, the dead girl, then Carewe, then Argyll, and lastly Mrs. Carewe."

Linda clutched Argyll's arm. "DeWitt knew about our meetings!" She seemed as if she were just finding that out.

"We didn't try to hide it very well," said Argyll.

Banner kept his eyes on Linda. "You don't ask like a native New Yorker, kitten. Where'd you hail from?"

"Pawtucket, Rhode Island."

"What'd you do before you married Carewe?"

"I was a dancing teacher."

Banner brightened. "Can you do the Paris cancan?" She looked at him frosty faced. Banner crowed. "If you can, don't be bashful about 'fessing up."

"This is neither the time nor the place for anything like that," she said heatedly. "I want to tell you what kind of man my husband was—is . . . Oh, I don't know. Have I killed him or not?" she ended in a whimper.

"He's not dead," said Argyll stiffly. "We saw and heard him."

"All right," she said, trying to convince herself. "He's not dead. But he might easily be. I don't know—it's all so puzzling, so mysterious." She paused and shuddered in the warm comfortable dining room. "Borden, how old would you say DeWitt is?"

"About forty," said Argyll without hesitation.

"He *looks* forty," she whispered. "But he has an old Bible with a metal clasp. He always kept the clasp locked. I'd never seen him open it. He told me to keep my hands off it. The other day I broke open the clasp. His birthdate is on the flyleaf. *He's fifty-nine years old!*"

The clatter of dishes seemed far away. Centuries away. The Dark Ages yawned again for an instant and they seemed to hear a thin, tortured cry of "Witchcraft!"

Argyll put his hand on Linda's for a moment to calm her. Then he drained his whisky glass to steady himself. Honeywell sat rooted there, fascinated. Banner covered up a burp with his serviette to his lips.

She went on, "I'll never forget the first day of our married life when I stepped into his vast studio apartment. It has crimson curtains and black drapes and brass ceremonial gongs. The place always reeks of incense. It doesn't seem real. It doesn't seem as if these things could happen in New York. That very same night he asked me if I would go with him to a celebration of the Black Mass.

"I was stunned. He said, 'Phyllis will be there. She'll act as assistant—my scarlet-robed acolyte.' His animal teeth seemed to grow longer as he grinned at me. I tore away from him and locked myself in my room. He called through the door that if I wanted him I would merely have to draw a pentagram—a five-sided figure—in chalk on the black oak floor and he would reappear. . . . And then there were other things, like the books about werewolves in his library. And the lampshade of human skin. Today"—her words stumbled—"I wanted to finish with him. I made a meal for him and put five grains of arsenic in his milk. I saw him take it. But he didn't die! He's—he's the devil!"

BANNER thoughtfully sipped his coffee with the spoon standing in the cup and almost poking him in the eye. Another of his Bannerisms. He said, "*Three* grains would kill an adult. Where'd you get the arsenic? By soaking flypaper?"

"No, no. I found it in his medicine cabinet."

"Mebbe it wasn't arsenic."

"It was, Senator. My friend has rats in her basement. I tried it on them. They died."

Honeywell stirred and spoke with a frog in his throat. "Only Beelzebub could vanish the way *he* did."

"I wanna hear about that," said Banner.

Argyll told the story up to the time he started for the blackened glass door with the match flickering in his hand.

"Now whoa right there!" Banner halted him. "Could Carewe have flown the coop in the instant of complete darkness before you struck the match?"

"No" said Argyll positively. "Those glass doors make a noise when you open and close them. Aside from that, the doorknob rattles when you turn it. He had no time to do it silently and we never heard a sound."

"All right. So he was still in the room as you barged in."

Argyll said, "I touched the light bulb. It was warm."

"The light had just been turned out. Did he wriggle out the door before you lighted the floor lamp again?"

Linda said, "I was in the doorway. He couldn't have got out without crowding me. Besides, I could see the whole room vaguely. There was illumination from Borden's match."

"No other exits but the door?"

"None," said Honeywell, chiming in.

"No place in the room to hide?"

Argyll shook his head.

Banner frowned at all three of them in turn. "Against which wall is the lamp?"

"To the left and rear as you go into the office."

"And that's the only wall, or portion of wall, that you can see when you stand at the turn of the corridor?"

"Yes," said Honeywell.

"Can you solve it?" asked Linda impatiently.

"Can you?" countered Banner.

She said no in a little voice.

Banner said, "I'm just another Boobus Americanus. What you people have done is handed me a lemon on a tray . . . Forget about Carewe for a minute. I'm keen on models. Has anyone got a good word for Phyllis?"

Honeywell looked sideways at Linda. "Mrs. Carewe," he said embarrassedly, "there are unpleasant things that I'm aware of that have to come out now. I happen to know that Phyllis and Carewe were in love before he married you."

"The old billy goat," chuckled Banner.

Linda kept her eyes on the salt cellar.

HONEYWELL continued, "They'd been in love for several years. Then Carewe quit her abruptly to marry you. Phyllis pretended to take it as a woman of the world should, but in her heart I knew she was jealous and embittered. She sunk her teeth in Carewe. She strafed him with extortion. She bled him for huge sums of money under the threat of telling you about them.

Argyll beamed. "That's why Carewe killed Phyllis. That's the motive."

"Sounds possible," agreed Banner. "Going back to Carewe, let's grant that that he got out of the room without harping too much on the *how* of it. Did he get out of the Galleries?"

"No," said Linda.

"Yes," said Honeywell.

"Which is it?"

"To tell the story in proper sequence," said Argyll, "Linda and I waited in the Seventeenth Century Gallery for Honeywell to join us after he'd phoned the police."

Linda interrupted, "Then I heard something strange. Remember I told you, Borden?"

Argyll frowned doubtfully. "I'm not sure."

"I am," she said. "It was a rapid clicking sound—a whirring—like a window blind being pulled down."

"A window blind?" Banner juggled his furry black eyebrows.

"There aren't any in the whole building," said Honeywell.

"No," said Argyll, shaking his head. He looked at Linda as if to tell her to stop being so silly.

Honeywell continued, "I joined Mrs. Carewe and Argyll after I'd phoned for the police. 'We must stick together,' I said. And we did. We went first to the back door of the building. It was locked from the inside the way it generally is. The only other door is the front. We went there and found the door attendant, old McPherson, talking to a newsboy. Both of them swore that Carewe—nor anyone else, for that matter—had not gone out that way."

"The windows," suggested Banner.

"All of them burglar-proof," said Honeywell promptly. "No one can use them to get in or out without setting off an alarm. Before the police came

we made a hasty but thorough tour of the whole building. It's a fairly easy place to search. Nothing but paintings and small art objects. *Carewe was not in the building!*"

"Ha!" chortled Banner. "I know where he's hiding!"

"Where?" cried all three at once.

"In a suit of armor!"

Honeywell sighed with disappointment and shook his head. "There's no armor in the Galleries."

Banner's ruddy face was wry. "I've always wanted to get on a case where somebody hid in a suit of armor. No such luck." He started picking his teeth meditatively with a raccoon-bone toothpick on the end of a tarnished silver chain.

Honeywell said, "There we were up against it. Carewe had not only escaped from the room when he turned out the light—he disappeared bodily from the entire Galleries!"

"Did the police hunt for him when they came?"

"They certainly did. They looked into everything that could conceal a live man."

"Yass, yass." Banner leaned back and jabbed a cigar into his mouth. He didn't light it. He never did. He gnawed it. "Carewe committed the murder, then dissolved. That's the picture." He looked sweetly at Linda. "Do you think you'd melt, sugar, if you went out in the rain again with me? Of course not."

Linda merely looked at him, puzzled.

Honeywell said, "Where are you going?"

"To the Galleries. All of us."

"At this time of night?" said Argyll, shocked.

"I'm gonna make one last stab at finding Carewe and doping out how he escaped." He started to look around for his white campaign hat and finally discovered that he was sitting on it. He punched it back into shape.

"I wonder," he mused, "if I oughta take some chalk with me to draw a pentagram. Mebbe it'd help us materialize Satan."

A POLICEMAN in a glistening poncho had replaced McPherson at the front door. He shined a heavy duty flashlight in their eyes, then Banner showed him his special salmon-colored police card.

The policeman let them into the Galleries.

Banner said to them, "That's Coyne, the cop who shot it out last month with Four-Finger Flannigan, the vice czar."

They stood dripping in the dark main hall until Honeywell found a switch and threw it, lighting their way. Their heels rang eerily on the cold bare marble.

First, Banner had a look into the Trustees' office, whence Carewe had vanished. He posed by the floor lamp and had Argyll and Linda go out to the corner of the corridor. Then he had Argyll stand by the lamp and went out to the corner himself for a look.

He trotted back. "See anything wrong with it, Argyll?"

"No, Senator," said Argyll.

"That's the trouble. That's what's giving me the screaming meemies."

He led the way to the Director's office. It was fifteen feet farther down the corridor, across from the Trustees' office.

The furnishings were similar to the first office, but arranged differently. The floor lamp in here was deep on the right.

Banner said, "This's where you were, Honeywell, when it all happened?"

"Yes," said Honeywell.

"Here in the dark?"

"Huh?"

"Linda and Argyll say that when Carewe turned out the light in the other room the whole corridor went dark. This room has a plate glass door too. If your light was on, it would've shined out."

"Of course it wasn't on," said

Honeywell, a trifle pettishly. "As I told them, I'd had a Judo lesson late in the morning. And I was lying on that studio couch"—he pointed—"resting. I wasn't asleep. Just relaxing here in the dark."

"Carewe never disturbed you?"

"Not today."

Banner strayed to Honeywell's desk. There were a variety of objects on it. Banner began to toy with some colored glass squares. "What're these used for?"

"They're stereopticon slides for our magic lantern," said Honeywell. "Those you're handling are pictures of Oaxaca pottery."

"Magic lantern?" said Banner. "Then you have a movie theatre."

"You can call it that. Very small one."

"Is it located near the Seventeenth Century Gallery?"

"Close to it," said Honeywell, his brows knitted together over his beribboned eyeglasses.

"We'll go there."

They filed slowly into the miniature theatre. Looking down over the slope of seat-backs, they saw the screen. It was pulled down.

Banner ambled to it. It hung about eleven inches out from the wall. He grasped the lower edge and gave it a sharp jerk, then released it. It started to roll itself up rapidly on a spring.

As it went up it made a rapid clicking sound—a whirring—like a window blind.

And they saw a man with a face like Satan!

HE WAS hanging there. But he was dead. His neck was in a noose. The rope ran up over a hook, then down again to be fastened at the baseboard. All covered by the screen.

"Sweet Marguerite!" grunted Banner. "What d'you think of that?"

"He hung himself," gasped Argyll.

Linda put her hands up to her face to shut out the sight.

"We never thought of looking—*there*," murmured Honeywell.

"Neither did anyone else," said Banner. "You were looking for a *live* man. Not one hanging. And the screen looked innocently close to the wall. Only about eleven inches clearance. But you'd be surprised how little space you take up hanging that way. We've all been obtuse. Something else was obtuse today too. I'll tell you later. Honeywell, skip out and fetch Coyne, the cop on guard."

Honeywell didn't skip out. He plodded.

"But how, Senator?" pleaded Linda. "How has he been able to do all this?"

"You wondered," said Banner slowly, "why you didn't kill him when you flavored his milk with five grains of arsenic. You've heard of men taking more than that without it harming them, haven't you?"

"Addicts!" cried Argyll.

Banner nodded. "Yass. Was your husband on record as ever having a skin disease, Linda?"

"A skin disease? Oh yes. He once mentioned having had psoriasis. But he was cured long ago."

"Oh sure. The baker's itch. The cure is *arsenic*. That started him off. Another thing. Arsenic puts the youthful bloom in your cheeks. Does that answer another question?"

Linda stared. "That's why he looked so young!"

"I'm still bothered," muttered Argyll. "How—?"

Honeywell returned with Coyne. Seeing the hanging corpse, Coyne crossed himself religiously and exclaimed, " 'Tis the divil hisself!"

Banner scowled. "No. Just a poor sap with buck teeth." He lifted his voice. "Lemme finish. Ready for the surprises? I told you something else was obtuse. It's an obtuse angle. Every schoolboy knows that the angle of reflection is equal to the angle of incidence."

"What are you talking about?" said Linda irritably. She studiously kept her eyes away from the wall.

"Ever notice what you see when you look in a mirror?"

Argyll answered. "My reflection, of course."

"Is it accurate?"

"Naturally."

"No, it ain't," said Banner. "When you move your right hand, the *left* hand in the mirror moves. It's completely the reverse."

"I see what you mean," said Argyll. "But how does that apply?"

"When you stand at the corner of the corridor," said Banner, "and look toward the door through which you last saw Carewe, an obtuse angle is formed. It's fifteen feet from you to the Trustee's door. And then the line rebounds off that door to go another oblique fifteen feet to the Director's door across the hall. Get it? The floor lamp in the Trustees' office, you said, is deep on the *left*. The floor lamp in the Director's office is deep on the *right*. But if you saw a reflection of the Director's office in a mirror, the lamp'd be to the left and rear—exactly the way it is in the Trustee's office!"

"You can't mean that what we saw was—" Argyll started to blurt.

"Carewe was never in the Trustee's office! He vanished, because he was never in there. It was the floor lamp in the *Director's* office that he turned out. What you saw was his reflection on the glass door, made into a perfect mirror with a black room behind it. The way you can often see passengers up ahead in the same car when you look out a train window at night." He turned suddenly with an alarming gesture of accusation. "Honeywell, you lied!"

"My God!" said Honeywell piously. "You're not accusing me of being in league with that devil."

BANNER nodded. "Worse than that, Honeywell. You killed Phyllis. You know too much about her blackmailing of Carewe not to have a whole hand in the pie. You drove her to it. When she got sick and tired of being your cat's paw, you killed her to stop her from blabbing to Carewe about you."

"You don't know what you're saying," cried Honeywell.

"Today she told you to go find another pigeon. You had to think fast. You told her to wait in the Trustees' office, that you had to have time to think it over. You had to have time, all right—to calculate her murder. You chawed your nails alone in the Director's office. Then Carewe burst in on your maledictions with the story of how his wife had tried to poison him so that she could fly off with her Skeeziks.

"Carewe was full of sly tricks. He wanted to put the fear of the devil into these two with an idea he'd formed by his observation of the way the doors on that corridor were arranged. He told you all about it. You fell in with it. It was like the final piece in a jigsaw puzzle. While Carewe was off spooking Linda and Argyll in the gallery, you were murdering Phyllis with the silver alpaca. You turned out the Trustees' light. That's why Argyll found the bulb still warm when he touched it less than three minutes later. You'd left Phyllis's body lying there and you'd gone into the Director's office. That light you left burning. Carewe returned to you breathlessly, never suspecting that you'd committed a murder in the meantime. His spoof was working like a charm. Linda and Argyll had the wind up and they were tailing a ghost. Carewe stood near the lamp by the right wall, looking diagonally out toward the Trustee's office door.

"When Linda and Argyll poked into sight, they saw his *reflection* in the office door for a moment before he plunged the whole place into darkness. Argyll crashed into the wrong room. And Carewe had every opportunity in the world to slip out of the other, unwatched office and into the little theatre.

"Honeywell, you sent Linda and

Argyll into the Seventeenth Century Gallery ahead of you. You took a moment to call the police, then dodged into the theatre to see Carewe. You knew that as soon as he heard about the murder he'd tell how he really disappeared, to save his own skin. You had to kill him too. You knocked him out with a plexus blow. You know all those pretty tricks. You practice Judo. Then you strung the unconscious Carewe up. Linda heard you pull down the movie screen to hide the body . . . Watch him, Coyne! I didn't bring my revulver! He's a bone breaker!"

"So'm I," grunted Coyne. As Honeywell made a lunge, Coyne broke a clawing arm with his alert nightstick.

Honeywell dropped, groaning.

As they went out into the rainy night, Linda said to Banner, "Why did Honeywell go to such lengths to get money in the first place?"

Banner snorted. "Having these Galleries was enough to keep him broke. How a guy can expect to get a nickel back on a Siwash outfit like this beats me."

Art, to Banner, was just a man's name.

We Die and Learn

By Roy Lopez

(Continued from page 26)

Jeff tried not to look at her. "It's a mistake," he shouted. "I never saw this note. I left here with Waldo at one-thirty—"

"Anybody see you leave?"

They had gone out the back way. Nobody had seen them.

The hook was in and Jeff knew it. Even leaving himself without an alibi for that hour was unimportant now. If a trail led from Vonchek's body to him, it still could be no worse than this. He'd have to risk it.

"Waldo, tell them." His lips were rubber. "You know I've been decent to you. Tell them the truth."

"You been decent to me, Jeff," Waldo nodded. "I do anything for you. I do just what you tell me to."

The big ex-fighter's face creased into that heavy, exaggerated scowl of concentration. "You were sore as hell at Moody. He was hanging around Sharleen too much—"

"No!" Jeff screamed. "The truth, Waldo! The truth!"

The words didn't penetrade. Jeff listened in horror as Waldo slammed the door of the death chamber on him.

" . . . You were sore as hell at Moody. I told that to the people in the beanery. You were sore at Moody for what he was trying to pull with Sharleen, and you said he got what was coming to him."

Waldo was out of breath when it was over, but he smiled at Jeff happily. He had said just what Jeff had told him to. He'd do anything for Jeff. Jeff was the greatest guy in the world.

Booty and the Babe

"Dizzy Duo" Yarn

By Joe Archibald

Snooty Piper, nutty Beantown newshawk, writes a Lonely Hearts letter that's returned to him by a cadaver.

IF THERE is anything Snooty Piper hasn't tried, it is to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel, and I am quite sure he will do that if he ever gets married and goes there. We are in the city room of the Boston *Evening Star* one morning when he picks up a magazine from a sob sister's desk. It is called *Truly Romantic* and he turns to a page not far from the back cover.

"Dames are all alike, Scoop," Snooty says. "Here is another one of those things like—I mean they should be arrested wolfing through the mails. Lonely Hearts, it says here, tsk-tsk. It should be captioned, 'Meal Tickets Wanted. Send at Once Size of Your Bankroll and List Stocks and Bonds.' The only chicks left that want to start from scratch are in barnyards. I wisht I could spot an ad saying a young widow who looks like Lana Darnell and who is loaded with more clams than the Maine mud-flats, wants a husband who is journalistic inclined."

"Snooty," I says, "you haven't by any chance enrolled in a Lonely Hearts?"

"Don't be silly," Snooty sniffs, tossing the snooch journal back on the desk. "Do I look that stupid?"

"You know I wouldn't answer that," I says just as Dogface Woolsey, the city editor, comes in.

Woolsey lives with an ulcer and also Mrs. Woolsey, so he has a good excuse for being the character that he is. He slams a morning paper on his desk and yells at us.

"Why ain't you two lemonheads down to headquarters?" Woolsey wants to know.

"Why should we be?" Snooty asks innocently.

"Don't you read newspapers?" Dogface screeches.

"Shoemakers never think to half-sole their own clodhoppers," I says.

The city editor sighs deeply and slumps into his chair, holding his head in his hands. Suddenly he jumps to his feet and says for us to get to aitch down to police headquarters.

"There was only a thirty-grand safe-blowing over in Charlestown, that was all!" Dogface howls. "They got a suspect or two and— Would you mind just going to the cops and see if they're the right ones?" He gets a demented look again and reaches for an ink bottle and we hurry out of the city room.

When we get down to the Berkeley Street bastile, we discover that the suspects are already being whitewashed and put back into circulation. Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy comes out of a grill room looking quite as cool as a lamb chop just off the coals, and growling down his rain-barrel chest.

O'Shaughnessy is classified as a detective on the Boston payroll and it is like listing a hobo off the Commons as a park superintendent. Iron Jaw would have a terrible time shadowing three hippos that got locked up in Braves Field. And he is the biggest citizen in the world you do not have to pay an admission fee to see.

"Good morning to you, Iron Jaw," Snooty says. "Didn't you use that truth serum called scallopini? It acts quicker than a hose."

"Git out of my way, type louse!" Iron Jaw yelps. "So they're leavin' them punks go free when I know they are guilty."

"When you say that about any dishonest gee," Snooty says, "it is as good as an acquittal, O'Shaughnessy. It is you who should confess as every time you get paid you commit grand larceny."

I know when it's wise to get out of Iron Jaw's presence. I start running. I open a door and jump inside, but the D.A. is in there and he chases me right out again.

I hear quite a commotion out in the street and when I get there I see Snooty Piper clinging to the back of a sanitation truck while Iron Jaw is sitting on the asphalt with a garbage can over his head instead of his derby, and he is festooned with coffee grounds, potato peelings, and such.

"That I had to miss," I gripe, and head for the Greek's over by Scollay Square.

Snooty, who is sitting in a booth when I arrive, lowers his noggin and asks me to see if it is cracked.

"He hit me with his derby, Scoop," the crackpot says. "I would have rather been hit by an iron kettle."

"Just a bump half as big as a grapefruit," I says. "Why don't you leave him alone, Snooty?"

"I got to git some laughs somewheres, Scoop. Most radio comedians are corny. I'd better call Dogface and report that the criminals are still at large. This would've been worth following up if somebody had got murdered in connection with it."

"Why don't you apply for a job in a slaughtering pen?" I sniff. "You would revel in your work."

SNOOTY goes to a phone booth, walking as slow as a citizen with a head shave and a plit pant-leg. He is in the public utility box less than a minute before he comes flying back. He bowls over Nick and our second order of beer, and his eyes are as big as an owl's at midnight.

"Scoop!" he cries out. "There is a murder! Follow me!"

He turns and heads for the door and knocks the Greek down again,

and Nick calls us some very uncouth names as we reach the street.

"There goes our credit," I gasp as I jump into a cab behind Snooty. "And He'll sue us for what we owe. Who got murdered, for Pete's sake—the mayor?"

"Murder is murder whether it happens to a bum or a bureaucrat," Snooty says, and gives the driver an address in Chelsea. "Nobody should git away with it."

Twenty minutes later we arrive at an empty lot between two cold-water flats and find quite a crowd of natives there being held back by the gendarmes. The meat wagon is present, and two blitz cars. Me and Snoofy flash our credentials and are soon introduced to the defunct who was stumbled over by a couple of sprouts while playing cops and robbers. A Chelsea flatfoot tells us that the corpse appraiser has been and gone.

"He was knocked off around midnight," the cop says. "The heater was about thirty-eight calibre. He carried a Social Security card with the name, Tyrone Icke. It says he was employed in a chocolate factory in Somerville. We found nothin' in his pockets but a letter whicht makes no sense at all. Awright, boys," he says to the deep-freeze jalopy crew, "take the stiff away."

I take a gander at the liquidated character and wonder if I haven't seen him before, when he was more animated. He is dressed quite charmingly in a suit that cost close to a hundred bucks, and before rigor mortis set in his pan could not have been bad to look at. It is the small scar over his right eye that puts butterflies in my stomach.

"Yeah," the Chelsea flatfoot says, "listen to this letter which was to a dame. 'Dear M.F.T.: I am interested in your proposition and your description is just my type. I am lonely, too, and I am sure this is fate. It is kismet. As far as my financial standing is concerned, let us say I am just an ambitious journalist with great prospects, and I'm sure you are the type who would not think of marriage as a cold cash deal but would work along with a guy and inspire him to better things. Anxiously waiting for your reply I am hopefully yours. H.P.P. 38½ St. Botolph St., Boston Mass.' "

I sit down on an old orange crate. I want to bust out laughing but I am too disgusted. I look at Snooty but he turns his back to me and he says:

"Of all the suckers, huh? Why do they fall for that eyewash? But the letter was written to a dame so why does this character have it on him?"

"It beats the devil out of me," the flatfoot says.

I keep staring at Snooty and marvel at his crust, which is ten times as thick as any bride's first pie.

"Anybody who would answer an ad like that," I says, "is as brainless as the head of a cane. He is four grades lower than a moron. Got any ideas about this one, Snooty Piper?"

"It is quite a mystery, Scoop," Snooty says, unabashed. "The worst coincidence is that whoever wrote that letter on a typewriter lives at our rooming house."

"What?" the Chelsea dick yelps.

"Why don't you confess, Nature Boy?" I says to Snooty. "The cops are going to follow every lead and our landlady will admit they are your initials. They'll find out if you work at the *Evening Star* and will check the Remingwood typewriter. Maybe you'll get off with twenty years."

"It was only a gag!" Snooty protests. "It is the worst break I ever saw. If I'd written a mash note to Ingrid Dietrich, they would have found it on Axis Sally. Look, I can show you the ad in the mag. I answered it just for a laugh."

"Well, you better come along with us, Piper," the dick says very sternly. "You are involved in this."

Snooty is quite agitated for the first time since I made his acquaintance. He tries to light a cigarette and drops the matches. He fumbles around in the grass and can't find them.

"Relax," I says, and stoop over and pick up the match book.

"G-gimme a light, S-Scoop," Snooty says. "This is awful. You remember that shyst—er—lawyer we met last week? Get me a mouthpiece somewhere, anywhere. Ask Mr. Guppy."

We go over to Chelsea police headquarters. Snooty tells his story while he holds a Bible. It is my testimony that springs him without bail.

"Yeah, Binney," a cop laughs. "After what you told us about Piper, I don't see how we can hold him on any charge but mental deficiency. But you're responsible for the schmoe, so don't let him skip town."

"How far could I get on a buck and thirty-four cents?" Snooty sniffs. "Scoop, if this ever gets out, I am ruined."

I TAKE the screwball over to a tavern and get the shakes out of him. Snooty Piper is not the sort of citizen who stays scared for long. After a single beer he pounds his fist against the bar and says this is one murder case he will follow through until the end of time.

"I keep thinkin' of the corpse," I says. "He sure looked familiar. You never got an answer from the babe, huh?"

"Of course not!" Snooty says. "She was out for plenty of moola, that's all. She had to be a pal of the deceased or else why would he have been packin' my letter? I'll never give a dame the right time from now on."

A few minutes later we leave the oasis and are waiting for a street car when up comes a canary with honey-colored tresses and gams she refuses to hide with the new styles.

"Pardon me," the cute trick says to Snooty Piper. "Would you give me the right time? I have my watch at a jeweler's and I have an appointment."

"If you are late," Snooty says, "I will call a cab. Maybe you're goin' my way. It'll be a pleasure to—"

I grab Snooty by the tail of his green coat.

"Scram, sister," I says to the startled dame. "He's just out of a snake pit."

"You ain't safe anywhere," I says as I push Snooty onto a street car. "Nobody's safe with you."

It is nearly twenty-four hours later while me and Snooty are at headquarters in the Hub that we learn the real identity of the murder victim, Tyrone Icke. The description of the unfortunate character had intrigued the cops of Boston proper, and Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy and three other flatfeet had gone to the morgue to get a gander at the cadaver. They had brought his prints and a picture of his dead pan back to Berkeley Street and soon had him pegged as the late Bodie Vido, better known in the not so dim past as Bodie The Badger.

"An' from what I hear, you lame-brained sap," Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy says to Snooty, "you could still be an excessory to his rubout. I bet you're tryin' to make crime pay at both ends an' if I only git somethin' on you that'll tie you in with this—"

"Even if I was guilty, blubberhead," Snooty says, "you would only be a help to me."

"I *knew* I recognized that stiff," I says. "It all comes back to me now. Vido and two other characters, one a babe, used to make a nice thing out of shakin' down unsuspectin' wolves who liked to prowl. The doll's name eludes me for the moment, but she would've changed it anyway. The old malarkey of finding a husband, mostly, in a compromisin' situation with somebody else's fake wife. Bodie Vido worked along with another dishonest gee named—er—Louie Schnozza."

Snooty snaps his fingers. "And that doll that was the lure is this M.F.T. I wrote the letter to, huh? Sure, they got crossed up by a fake husband in Brookline who was really a cop, and Bodie The Badger sang and got a light rap. The babe lammed out of a window and down a fire escape and they never

got her. Louie Schnozza got three to seven and so—"

"He looked for Bodie Vido when he got out on parole," I says. "It looks like he caught up with the crook. Iron Jaw, this should be easy even for you."

"The dame maybe carried a wig in her bag," Snooty says. "She got to a railroad station and turned herself from a blonde into a brunette or vice versa. Then she went into another line of business when the heat was off, grabbin' love-sick bachelors' pokes. And it looks like she contacted Bodie Vido—after he got out—to help her, as how else would my letter have got on him? Most likely he was the character who had to twist an arm if a prospect got tough."

"Yeah, it is just the way I figgered it," Iron Jaw says. "So don't think you punks are doin' me no favors. I'll have that Louie Schnozza in custodian inside twenty-four hours."

"You know we like to needle you, O'Shaughnessy," Snooty says. "It is because we like you. Actually, we always admit that you are a pretty smart operator. I wish you would let us come along and watch you work. Our public likes to hear about guardians of their rights like you."

"Well," Iron Jaw says, "I guess I have misunderstood you boys. Sure, come along if you want to, but just don't git in the way."

IT TAKES the police nearly forty-eight hours to locate the residence of Louie Schnozza. With some help from the parole board, Iron Jaw and his man hunters finally corner him in a furnished room on Causeway Street. Me and Snooty enter the roach playground with the cops.

Louie is not very pleased with his visitors. He is a testy character with little beady eyes that are planted as close together as the dots of a colon. His pan is angular and oily and he wears clothes you would expect to see on citizens meandering about the Copley Plaza.

"Awright, Louie," Iron Jaw says, using his great tact as usual, "leave us drop the prelims. Why did you bump off Bodie The Badger? You had the motive an' you know it. Frisk him, boys."

"You ain't changed a bit, O'Shaughnessy," Louie Snaps. "Right now you ain't even warm, you big stob. I didn't knock off Bodie but I was considerin' it. Go ahead an' search, you Keystone coppers. You might find a nail file an' a comb. I been legit sincet I got out."

"Okay," Iron Jaw growls, sitting down on the bed. "Where was you between the hours of eleven an' twelve on the night Bodie Vido was knocked off, huh? It was last Wednesday, Louie. Think fast."

"Me?" Louie Schnozza wants to know. "Why, that's easy. I was—well, I forget. I've got the worst memory. Seein' as I didn't do it, try an' pin it on me, you dumb hippo!"

"No alibi," Iron Jaw says. "We're takin' you in, Louie. Maybe after a couple hours in the grill room you'll remember."

"Wanna bet, Tiny?" Schnozza sniffs.

"How much do you get where you're workin', Louie?" Iron Jaw asks.

"Fifty bucks a week."

"That burlap you're wearin' cost a hun-erd."

"I got it wholesale, Fatso. Any more questions?"

"Not here," Iron Jaw yelps. "All I know is you won't never git sixty-four dollars, Louie. Grab your hat, punk!"

They take Louie Schnozza to headquarters and lock him up. Me and Snooty head for the Greek's.

"Scoop," Snooty says, "that lug is as guilty as a mink with chicken feathers on its mouth. If not for knockin' off Bodie The Badger, then for something else. Iron Jaw has to win sooner or later. Even the White Sox do."

"I would not employ the character to watch over a safe," I admit. "He didn't have an alibi, Snooty. We should have asked Louie about that doll with the initials, M.F.T."

We walked into the Greek and are very pleased to discover that Nick isn't a citizen to hold a grudge. He does tell us, however, that we have just three days to pay up what we have on the cuff, and he introduces us to a big character with lumps of putty for ears and fists as big as roasts of beef.

"My bill collactor," Nick says. "Battleeng Boffski, from South Boston."

"A pleasure," I rattle through my teeth.

"We must ask Dogface for an advance," Snooty sighs.

"I hope you boys don't gimme no trouble," the pug says. "I got ulsters."

We sit down. Snooty shoves a cigarette between his lips and it vibrates like a plucked harp string. "Let me have a match, S-Scoop," he says.

I give him a book of matches, and then I turn to Nick. "Two beers," I says. "I'll pay cash."

"You're tallin' me, Binney?"

Nick ambles away. Snooty asks me when I was in Bangor, Maine.

"Give me that again?" I request of him.

"These matches, Scoop. They advertise Cuddy's Cozy Cabins. And—look inside on the cover. Somebody's scribbled somethin'. Er, it says—Ambrose's Animal Farm, Saugus, Mass."

I snatch the book of matches out of Snooty's fingers and look for myself. I feel an ice cube rolling down my spine.

"S-Snooty, you will remember I picked up the matches you dropped out there beside the corpse of Bodie The Badger. The weeds an' grass was thick an' maybe I didn't pick up the match book you dropped. Maybe the murderer—"

"Huh?"

"It is a long way from cozy cabins in Bangor to an animal farm in Saugus," I says.

"Stop," Snooty says. "I have to think this one over, Scoop. It could be that the owner of the animal farm drove to Bangor on his vacation."

"If he knew where he lived, would he jot down his own address?" I ask.

"It would be quite silly, Scoop. What could we lose by goin' out there?"

"I wish I could answer that one," I reply.

"Leave us go to the *Evening Star*, Scoop," Snooty suggests. "We will ask for the loan of Dogface's jalopy."

"*You* will," I says flatly.

WE go to the *Evening Star*. The city editor's sedan is at the curb and Snooty opens a door and peeks in.

"Why, Scoop," he says, "the keys are in the ignition. It will save time by not goin' up an' arguin' with the snook. Anyway, do you think he'd let us have it? Of course not. We will call up somewhere along the Turnpike an' tell him we have it. Get in, Scoop."

I do. As we drive away I make up my mind that I will see a psychiatrist the next A.M.

"Unless we find a dame with the initials, M.F.T.," I says as Snooty goes through a red light, "what good is all this?"

"We're gettin' fresh air anyways," Snooty says.

"Dogface will also give it to us, period, if— Look out, Snooty!"

The crackpot passes a car ahead. A truck is coming in fast and I shut my eyes and think of splints and plaster of Paris. There is quite a jolt and a ripping sound.

"Quick, Scoop," Snooty yelps. "Turn around and git that truck's license as they'll pay for that fender. I bet there isn't worst cowboys in Arizona."

We finally pull off the road and into Ambrose's Animal Farm. A big bear is chained to a tree stump and he bares his teeth at us. A cageful of monkies chatter at us, and when I get out of the jalopy I step within a foot of a snapping turtle's jaws.

"Don't pick up anythin' that looks like a rope, Scoop," Snooty warns. "It will sprout a hood and be a cobra. There is a lot of dangerous critters around here, it looks like. Here comes

a citizen who looks like the owner."

The character steps up. He is about thirty-five years old and looks happier than a reefer smoker. I bid him good afternoon.

"I take it you're the proprietor here," I says.

"That's right, mister. Maybe you want a nice canary, huh?"

"We're lookin' for one," Snooty says. "An' believe me if I find—"

"I got some real good singers," Ambrose says, and whistles a popular tune.

"What makes you so happy?" Snooty asks. "You win a jackpot on a radio program?"

"Me? Nope. Got married couple days ago to the sweetest gal in the world, Bub," Mr. Ambrose says. "Hate to be away from her more'n a few minutes at a time, so just tell me what you want. Got a nice armadillo I'll sell cheap."

"Yeah, there is nothin' I could use more'n one of those," Snooty sniffs. "Like an extra leg. We just thought we'd stop by and ask did you know a citizen named Bodie Vido."

"Never heard of the feller," Ambrose says. "Say, if you want a canary that'll sing, I've got—"

I hear Snooty Piper gasp for breath. I look at the moron and see that he is staring at a doll who is arranging some potted plants in front of Ambrose's business office. The babe looks our way and smiles quite sweetly.

"Mr. Ambrose," Snooty gulps out. "You are not kiddin'! Is that Mrs. Ambrose?"

"Yep. Mighty cute, huh?"

"How did you meet her?" Snooty asks in a very brash manner.

"Why, I, that is—I answered a—I don't see if it is any of your business, friend," Ambrose says, icing up.

"Initials are M.F.T.?"

The dealer in wild life nods. "Miriam's her first name. Her last name was Triblett. Now just what is your business here?"

"Let us have a talk with Mrs. Ambrose, Scoop," Snooty says, and he hikes over to the office.

It is quite a warm day but I already feel chilblains and wish I had an overcoat. Ambrose trudges along at my heels.

"Now, if my wife has run up a bill I never knew about, just tell me and I'll take care of it."

I FOLLOW Snooty inside the office. The babe turns and nods. "Now, what can I do for you gentlemen?" she asks.

"You'll find out," Snooty says. "Hmm. Five feet three inches tall, bluish green peepers, an' dark red hair. Slightly chubby. Yeah, it fits."

"Now you looka here!" Ambrose yelps. "Nobody's comin' here to appraise my wife like she was a prize cow at a fair. You fellers git goin' or I'll feed you both to my bears!"

"Yes. Just what *is* the idea?" the doll asks and her eyes throw double daggers. I am quite sure she is getting quite pale under her cosmetics.

"Awright, leave us face it!" Snooty says sternly. "I happen to be a sucker who answered your ad in *Truly Romantic*, too. I was the journalist with prospects. I said it was kismet, remember? But—this Ambrose was loaded, huh?"

The doll's lamps get smoky and she looks right at home with wild life. "You must be crazy," she says to Snooty. "Alfred, are you goin' to let him talk to me like this?"

"You fellers git goin'!" Ambrose yelps. "I'll lose my temper in a minute."

"You'll lose worst than that, you snook!" Snooty says. "I just want to ask this babe how come the letter I wrote in answer to her ad in a mush mag was found on a corpse who used to be Bodie Vido! Bodie was in a racket one time with a doll and another gee named Louis Schnozza. Louie is now in the hoosegow charged with rubbing out Bodie. The dame is unaccounted for—up to now!"

Mrs. Ambrose's gams get quite

rubbery and she drops a bowl of goldfish. "You don't believe any of that, do you, Ambrose?" she yelps.

"Why — er — not if these fellers can't prove it, honey. An' they better or else."

"It is easy," Snooty says. "Schnozza can easy identify this doll if we take her to the bastile in Boston. You have got the letter she wrote you sayin' she would marry you, huh? Most likely it was written in longhand like mine was and when we compare—"

It happens. Mrs. Ambrose throws an empty fishbowl and Snooty does not quite have time enough to duck. Glass showers me and Ambrose, and then the babe reaches into a big box of birdseed and comes up with a Betsy.

"Don't one of you move!" Mrs. Ambrose screeches, "or I'll let ya have it!"

She backs up, opens a door, and jumps outside. Snooty is reeling around, his eyes glazed, and Ambrose is standing there like he is starched.

"Come on, Snooty," I yelp, pushing him toward the door. "You want she should escape?"

We rush out into the back yard with Ambrose stumbling on behind, and then I try to scream. There is a big cage not ten feet away and out of it steps an ape nearly as big as Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy.

Mrs. Ambrose, alias M.F.T., laughs quite nastily. The beast bares its teeth and the doll yelps, "Get 'em, Murgatroyd!"

"Run fer your lives, fellers!" Ambrose gulps. "That thing'll do anythin' she says!"

I climb the nearest tree and when I get to a limb, a vulture stares me right in the eye. It stretches its scrawny neck and cocks its head to the side and I lose no time getting to terra firma. I see Snooty Piper on the roof of Ambrose's office and the big ape is waving what seems to be a green flag. Then I notice that Snooty has only one coat sleeve.

Alfred Ambrose is in the monkey cage with a dozen primates swarming over him, and I look around for the doll. She is hopping into Dogface Woolsey's jalopy and I start running. A very spine-chilling jungle cry ties anvils to my feet and I turn my noggin to see Murgatroyd coming at me.

"Don't let that babe git away, Scoop!" Snooty yelps.

"You don't say!" I choke out. "I'll send you a telegram from Providence."

Dogface's car starts up just as I climb an old oak tree that has been topped. A raccoon hisses at me and I tell it to shut up and move over. The babe is driving out to the Turnpike and is pouring on the coal, ignoring all rules.

She hits the main stem at precisely the same time with another car. I shut my eyes. There is a sound like a sheet-metal factory caving in, and a dame screams. I look. A headlight and a fender is flying through the air towards me and I almost grab the raccoon and hug it.

"That was a State cop's car!" Snooty yells. "Let's hurry an' save what we can, S-Scoop!"

I look around warily before I descend. The big ape is scampering toward his cage. A siren wails like a Banshee. Another blitz wagon turns in off the road and stops. Three cops pile out and run to the wreck.

"Awright, Tarzan!" Snooty yelps. "The cavalry has arrived."

WE go out to the shambles and see a cop crawlin' out from under a heap of junk. On all fours, he looks at a license plate near him.

"I'll be a monkey's uncle," he gulps. "It is the hot rod we been lookin' for. Stolen from in front of that newspaper."

"I'd say it was stoppin' it the hard way," Snooty says. "But she didn't—"

I step on the crackpot's foot. "Of courst she stole it," I sniff.

"By the way, where *is* she?" Snooty asks, and then I see a fender move.

Mrs. Ambrose then shoves a spare aside and blinks up at us like a bullfrog just out of a sound snooze.

"Hello—uh—Bodie," she says to me. "I always said—uh—Louie would wreck us yet. We better git out of here—uh—fast 'fore the cops. . . . W-who are you?"

"This babe," Snooty says, "knocked off a character named Bodie Vido over in Chelsea. There is a gee over in the Boston pokey who can identify her. That city editor is goin' to be awful sore about this jalopy."

I turn around and see Alfred Ambrose standing there with his mouth hanging open.

"Looks like I was took fer a ride," Ambrose says.

"Yeah," Snooty says. "What I can't figure out is why she really married you."

"I told her I was worth a hundred thousand dollars," the animal dealer said. "Guess that had something to do with it."

"It is one for the book, Scoop," Snooty says as the cops stand by, trying to add it all up. "A slayer givin' her description to me even before she committed her foul deed and she was tripped up by the matchmakers, ha! Well, let's give the doll first aid and take her in."

It is late that night when the babe talks. Snooty says Ambrose was not kidding when he said he had a canary who really could sing.

"Yeah, me and Bodie Vido shook down the lovelorn," M.F.T. admits. "We generally took 'em for five grand and then moved on. I had Bodie around to take care of the characters that got rough. I always said I wanted five grand in advance to be shown their intentions was good and to help pay off some old bills and buy a trousseau. Well, I contacted that rube out in Saugus. When we met he went overboard for me and said as soon as we were married he'd turn half of what he had over to me, which was fifty grand."

"So you figured to do it legit and then leave him, huh?" Snooty butts in. "But Bodie wanted half the fifty grand and he also wanted you. He was the jealous type. You found he was in the way so you rubbed him out. Later you would take care of Louie Schnozza, maybe. Then—"

"Who is tellin' this, blubbermouth?" the doll yips. "You or me?"

"Yeah," Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy growls. "An' now tell us, Piper, how this doll just happened to steal a jalopy belongin' to the city editor of your rag?"

"A mere coincidents," Snooty sniffs. "Prove it wasn't, you big ape. By the way, have you a half brother out in Saugus? He chased me an' Scoop right away so it would seem—"

I have to laugh. Then I ask Iron Jaw why Louie Schnozza did not have an alibi even though he did not knock off Bodie Vido.

"The lug was in a choc'lit factory in Cambridge at the time," Iron Jaw says. "He got scairt he couldn't beat a murder rap so he confessed to robbin' that safe."

"I had quite a field day," Snooty says. "I got a putout and an assist. That Roscoe there is the same one the babe used on Bodie Vido so it is all sewed up, Scoop. Let's go to the Greek's."

"D.A.," Iron Jaw gulps as we make our exit, "I still wouldn't believe this if it wasn't that I have got a half brother I ain't seen fer a long time. Can I have tomorrer off?"

"Take a year," the D.A. says. "Take two. You won't ever be missed."

A Corpse at Large

By Larry Holden

The corpse had disappeared, but the murderer was still around—a murderer who believed that one good corpse deserves another.

NOW the party was complete. Matt's grin threatened to spill over into his ears when he opened the door and saw Cathie standing there.

She smiled, "D a h - l i n g!" and stepped into the mouth of the long narrow tunnel that served as a foyer to his apartment. She reached out

and ran her forefinger lightly across his lips. "Don't look so surprised."

But he was surprised. Surprised and ecstatic—a strange state for a very hard-bitten private eye. But Cathie had promised often and showed up seldom, and Cathie to him was something very, very special, as special as her dark red smoldering hair. He impulsively kissed her neck as he lifted her coat back from her shoulders.

She said irritably, "Oh, Matt, I've told you so often, don't nuzzle me! If you want to kiss me, kiss me. But don't pant down my vertebrae!"

Still grinning, he turned her, took her by the shoulders and pushed her against the wall. He looked into her dark eyes for a moment, then turned his head and eased his lips into the vortex of her kiss. Her fingers slid across his cheek, across his lips and dammed his mounting emotion.

"I'm late," she said. She cocked her head and listened to the noise. "What have you got in there, Matt —a machine shop?"

"Just a bunch of visiting plumbers," he grinned. He took her elbow. "C'mon, let's chase them home."

They were halfway up the tunnel-like foyer when the bell buzzed urgently like a swarm of bees at a sealed hive. Matt looked at Cathie and shrugged. Everybody had arrived.

"Holy cow," he said, "I hope it's not the superintendent!"

He went quickly to the door, plastering on his most placating smile.

BUT it was not the superintendent. It was a young giant of six feet two, with a powerful though angular frame, and with a long, soft highly nervous face.

Matt snapped, "You again!" and shouldered into him, shoving him out into the corridor, closing the door behind him. "What the hell!"

"Wait a minute, Matt, please, please . . ."

There was something in the voice that made Matt look up sharply. There was dark terror in the man's eyes; terror, pleading and something else. Matt angrily disregarded it.

"Why don't you stop following Cathie around?" he demanded. "She's sick of it, and so am I. This is my party, so scream, beat it, hit the grit!"

He stepped back and started to close the door.

"Wait, listen to me, Matt. I'm in trouble, I'll pay you. . . ."

Matt stopped. "Trouble?" he said with interest. "What kind of trouble, Randolph, my boy?" The idea of Randolph, with all his millions, in trouble, pleased him. He stepped back into the corridor.

Randolph was after Cathie, and he was so filthy rich that he was practically a sewage system of gold. Cathie was a girl who liked the feel of a chinchilla cape in the closet. Matt's lone star of hope was that neither Cathie nor anybody else could stand Randolph and his acres of neuroses.

"Trouble?" repeated Matt with pleasure. "What kind of trouble, Randolph?"

The young giant's mouth twisted painfully, as if every thought of it was a barb in his flesh. "I—I killed a man," he stammered.

Matt suddenly stopped hating him. Terror is not a thing you can hate.

He said quietly, "Okay, take it easy, kid. How'd it happen?"

Randolph's mouth would not stop twisting; it was twitching every instant. "Guh-guh-get your coat," he finally managed to say. "I'll shuh-show you."

"Be right back."

Matt trotted up the long foyer. Cathie stopped him.

"That sounded like Randolph," she said angrily. "Don't tell me he followed me here, too!"

Matt chucked her under the chin. "For once, sweetheart," he said, "the guy's after my brains and not your brawn." It was the wrong note, and

he went on more soberly, "The poor guy killed somebody."

"*What!*"

"Or so he says. You never know with a screwball like that. However . . ." He gave his head a shake and strode up the foyer.

She was still standing there, wide-eyed and leaning against the wall, when he came back, swinging into his topcoat. He kissed her soberly.

"I'll be back if it takes all night," he whispered. "Wait up for me."

Randolph was twisting himself into knots out in the hall. He looked tragically at Matt. "I saw you tell Cathie," he said.

"What'd you expect? You walked right in behind her and she damn near heard every word you said."

"Oh, it's all right, it's all right," said Randolph hurriedly. "I trust her, but I'd rather have told her myself."

Matt gave him a puzzled glance. "And I'll bet you would have gotten a kick out of it. You have the damnedest ways of showing a girl you love her."

Randolph said woodenly, "We'll take my car. It's right downstairs."

ONE thing Randolph could do and that was drive. He slipped through traffic like a pickpocket through a crowd—but then, Matt reflected, it was something to do when you had twenty thousand dollars' worth of automobile to play with. Randolph's profile was tight and had that drawn-together look of anxiety.

"Who was the guy?" Matt asked, to get him talking and to ease him up.

Randolph said shortly, "Howie Moore."

"Howie Moore! How'd you get mixed up with that crumb? I thought he fed only on women?"

Randolph's lips lifted in a slight snarling smile. "I came in at the end," he jeered. "I finished him. Now shut up. I don't feel like talking."

Matt shrugged, but he didn't get it. One minute the guy was eating his fingernails and begging, and the next minute he was the lord of the manor putting the peasant in his place. Screwball!

A silent forty-five minutes later, they swung dangerously into the vast parking lot of The Lookout in a spray of flying gravel. It was a night club, perching high on the Palisades, overlooking the majestic Hudson River like a lighthouse. It was as expensive as a week in Miami, and even the view was ten dollars minimum.

"This the place?" asked Matt laconically.

"I thought you knew all about Howie Moore." Randolph curbed the gibe. "Sorry. This is his hangout. He bloodsucked the rich ones, you know. I left him right up at the end of—"

He swerved so suddenly into an empty parking space that Matt was jammed against the expensive ostrich leather of the door.

Randolph muttered, "We'll walk. Don't want anybody to see us."

"In this darkness? Why don't they put a light or two around here?"

"And let everybody see what goes on in the cars?"

Matt was surprised at the disapproving tone in Randolph's voice. Entirely baffled, he slid out of his side of the car as Randolph switched off the lights and slid out of the other side. Darkness fell like a hood.

Matt started, "I see what you mean about—" when the world exploded at the end of his chin and he went roaring out into deep space.

Coming back to consciousness was like crawling up through mud from the core of the earth. It was still dark. There was the saline flavor of blood in his mouth and a grinding pain at the back of his head.

He crawled dizzily to his feet. He knew instantly, of course, that Randolph's twenty-thousand-dollar supercar was gone, but at the moment it did not seem important. The important thing was to clear his head, and he clung to the rear fender of what

looked like another super-car. After a while, things took their proper perspective again.

Randolph's car was gone, and fury raged so hard in Matt that he slammed his fist into the side of the car against which he was leaning, and welcomed the bite of pain. He rubbed his bleeding knuckles, swearing, then cut across the parking lot toward the night club.

The doorman, placed there for exactly that purpose, barred his way.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said politely in a tough voice, "but you cannot come in without a lady."

MATT grinned bloodily at him. "Any bodies carried out of here tonight, Jasper?" he said, matching the doorman's hard voice. He briefly showed his badge. "We got a call on a killing, and somebody mugged me just now. What's the pitch?"

Anybody even half smart would have caught the flow in Matt's story, but he knew that doormen were selected for brawn. He jabbed again, keeping the doorman mentally off-balance.

"Assaulting a cop is still a crime. . . . Howie Moore inside?"

The doorman's huge, large-knuckled hands moved helplessly. He couldn't focus on the conversation; there was too much of it. He selected the last item, as Matt knew he would.

"H-he went out about two hours ago. I saw him. It wasn't him who socked you. I saw his car go out and he didn't come back."

"Who was with him?"

"Nobody. I didn't see nobody."

Matt pushed the doorman aside, and this time there was no opposition. Matt hadn't expected any.

"I'll take a look myself," he snapped. He pointed out into the darkness. "The lieutenant wants to see you in the squad car. G'wan, don't keep him waiting."

The doorman said, "Yessir," and strode out into the lot.

Matt grinned painfully. That took care of him. Now there wouldn't be any warning call to the bar, and if Howie Moore was there, he'd still be there. Matt went first to the men's room and washed his bloody face, then went up to the bar. It might have been a very nice bar but the lights were so dim that you could hardly see it.

A white-coated barkeep swam up out of the murk, like some goggle-eyed denizen of the deep sea, and murmured, "Yes, sir?"

Matt murmured back at him, "I'm a friend of Howie Moore's, but I'm not trying to buy anything with it. I just wanted to say hello."

"I'll say it for you." The barkeep was still murmuring. "This is the night he always takes his grandmother to the wrestling matches. She's a wrestler. And private snoops give her a pain, just like me."

"I'm sorry you give her a pain, too," Matt whispered. "But a customer of mine just told me he knocked off Howie Moore in your parking lot. I guess I'll have to take it to the cops."

"Somebody's kidding you, brother." The barkeep's voice now was normal but wary. "He went out two hours ago, and he didn't have no fights before he went. He just talked to a few dames like he always does, and that was all."

"How about a comedian about six feet two with a face like a wilted lily?"

"Not any night that I can remember."

The barkeep was earnest; he didn't drop into that toneless voice they usually did when they were covering. Matt nodded. He slid his card across the bar.

"Have him call me, just for luck," he said. "If I don't hear in two hours, I'll call him dead and turn it in. Thanks for the handout."

He saw the barkeep pick up the card as he slid off his stool and strode for the phone booths in the lobby.

The barkeep did not look like a happy man. Matt called a cab.

THE party was over when he got back to his apartment. Cathie smiled up at him from the sofa. "I sent them home," she said. "And I washed the glasses and emptied the ash trays. Who was the girl who wanted to wait for you? A blonde."

He leaned over and kissed her. It was as irresistible an impulse as touching wet paint.

"A blonde?" he said. "She was drunk."

"Quite. That's the reason I didn't worry." Then, soberly, "Is Randy in trouble?"

He shrugged and touched the sore spot on his chin. "Depends on what happens at the hour of—" he looked at his watch—"two A.M. At that time the guy he says he bumped off will either call me or he won't call me. If he doesn't, he's dead, because the people I left the message with will see to it that he does."

"How involved!" Cathie's smile was questioning. "But who, why, when and where?"

"A crumb named Howie Moore, who makes his living in ways that are most questionable. But you can't knock off lice like Howie Moore and get away with it, because the law figures you might start knocking off other people you don't like, and that's against it. But hell,"—he leaned forward—for another kiss—"let Randolph worry about that, and who worries about Randolph?"

A few minutes later he said, "Are all men as crazy about you as I am?"

She considered that seriously. "Not the way you are, Matt, no. They make passes, but you're nice."

He kissed her. Then: "You've been married."

She pulled her head back sharply. "Because I let you kiss me?"

"No, no. Well, that, but something extra. . . . Hell, I can't put my finger on it. I'm just one of the inarticulate illiterates. You know that."

"You're a very smart guy, Matt," she said slowly. "Yes, I've been married, but it was a mess, and I don't like to think about it. . . . Matt, what's going to happen to Randy? I don't like him, I can't stand him, but still I'm a little fond of him, if you know what I mean. He follows me around on dates and he hounds me, but he feeds my vanity. See?"

Matt said, "Yeah." His face turned somber. "This is what will happen to him. If Howie Moore doesn't call up, Randy will go to the chair. If Howie Moore does call up, he'll go to the hospital."

Howie Moore did not call up.

MATT waited until three A.M., then called police headquarters. Within fifteen minutes a lieutenant of detectives was at the door. Matt brought him into the living room.

"Lieutenant Fletcher, Cathie Schuyler," he introduced them. "Sit down, Fletch, and I'll get it over with as fast as I can."

He talked, Cathie made three drinks, and Fletcher listened. At the end, the lieutenant was rubbing his jaw and grimacing.

"Calvin Randolph the Third!" There was sarcasm in Fletcher's voice. "That guy's been in our hair since he teethed. If he bumped Howie Moore, it wouldn't surprise me a bit. It's just something he's been working up to for years. He's a nut. But just the fact that Howie didn't call you, Matt, don't mean he's dead."

"The Lookout would damn well see he called me after the pitch I gave them," Matt said with finality.

"Could be." Fletcher was cautious. "I'll look into it."

"The Randolph millions got you scared?" Matt asked nastily.

Fletcher's answer was bleak and flat. "You're damn right. I've got a wife and kids."

Matt nodded. "I'm sorry, Fletch. I was just sounding off." Matt was

genuinely sorry. He held up his chin. "Take a poke at it."

He saw with surprise that there was cold anger in Fletcher's eyes, then he remembered he had said that in front of Cathie. No cop could be expected to like that.

Fletcher said harshly, "Some day, maybe," and walked out.

Matt didn't offer to go to the door with him; that would have made it worse. Cathie looked at him with dark wonder.

"You made him mad, Matt," she said in a small voice.

"I know. It was a dumb stunt. I didn't think."

"It was so unlike you, Matt. I—I hope he won't hold it against you."

"Me, too. But he's a good cop, and if he can nail Randolph, he'll get a promote, then we'll be palsy-walsy again. And, sweetheart, if I can give him any help, believe me, I will."

Cathie smiled wanly. "Be careful, Matt." Then: "Good Heavens, it's almost four! I better go home before my reputation isn't."

The next morning, early, Matt called Fletcher. He didn't apologize, but his call itself was an apology. Fletcher was blunt, unrelenting—and hostile.

"I'll tell you, Matt," he said. "We found Howie Moore's car, empty, and no sign of Howie anyplace. That follows your story. But I got a different angle from The Lookout. They tell me up there *you* were looking for Howie with blood in your eye and blood on your face. The idea seems to be, you tangled with him, got a poke in the snoot, then went hunting for him."

"Wait a minute, Fletch. I told you—"

"Sure, *you* told me and *they* told me. What am I supposed to do—flip a coin?"

"Now wait a minute, Fletch. I've got a witness—"

"You mean Miss Schuyler? We thought of that, and we paid her a little visit. What is she supposed to have witnessed, Matt?"

Matt suddenly realized that Cathie had not actually overheard the conversation between him and Randolph, that all she knew was what he had told her. Fletcher's voice hammered into his ear.

"She tried to give you a pretty good cover, Matt, but it's got a million holes in it. However, until we get more of a line on Howie, we're standing pat."

Matt said angrily, "Thanks, pal. I'll call you back."

"Don't bother, Matt. We'll call *you* back."

Matt swore into the dead phone. He riffled through the phone book for Randolph's number, then called that, but he might just as well have been whispering up a chimney. There was no answer. He bit his nails, had a drink, then put on his clothes and went downstairs for his car. He had no clear idea of what he wanted to do, but he was not surprised when he pulled up in front of Cathie's apartment. He pushed her buzzer and picked up the earphone of the intercom.

Her voice came through the usual static, "Go away. I've already told Lieutenant Fletcher the story Randolph told Matt Cowan, word for word, now go away."

Matt laughed. "Wait a minute, sweetheart. This is Matt."

"Well. I thought it was the police again. I've been having police the way most people have mice. Come up, Matt, and comfort me."

HE WENT up. She was waiting at the door. She took his hand and drew him into her apartment. Her face looked long and sleepless, yet even more compelling. He kissed her almost savagely.

"Please, Matt," she said tiredly. "Not now, please. I—I've just had a call from Randy."

That stopped Matt. He jerked back his head and said, "What!"

"He just called me, Matt," she said wearily. "I think he's crazy. He wants me to go away with him."

"Oh, no!"

"Please, Matt. I'm so—so confused. I don't know, I don't know! I'm afraid of him, Matt. He gave me until this evening to make up my mind. He's going to call me back. What shall I do, Matt? He'll kill me if I don't. I know it. What shall I do?"

"He can't kill you if I'm here."

She touched his hair in a wistful gesture. "You're sweet, Matt. I wish I had met you a long time ago. But let's be practical. You can't stay with me forever. Even if we were married, you couldn't be at my side constantly."

"What did he say? What were his actual words?"

"I don't remember, Matt. He said —they'll never find us, and they'll never find Howie Moore. Wherever you go with me, you can walk the streets and not be afraid. But I've killed once and I can kill again, because it's easy, I've found out. I'll call you back at ten." She leaned her forehead against his chest. "That's not exact, Matt, but that's the gist of it." Her arms tightened around him. "I'm afraid, I'm afraid!"

He kissed the top of her head. "I'm going to mix you a drink," he said. "A good stiff one. It'll soothe you. Then I'm going to lock you in and go on the prowl. If he's handy"—his eyes turned long and grim—"I'll find him."

"But the police, Matt. Suppose they pick you up first? Stay with me!"

"They won't pick me up, baby. Don't worry. They'll have to kill me first."

"Oh, Matt," she said dully. "Maybe it would be better if I did go away with him. Something awful is going to happen. I know it. Somebody's going to get hurt."

Matt's grin was a glitter of hard teeth. "If he calls back while I'm gone, you can tell him this from me." He spoke slowly, accenting each word with menace. "You can tell him that no matter where he goes, the streets won't be safe for him because I'm not letting go of this until I finish it."

"He'll kill you, Matt!"

He grinned again and patted her cheek. "I'll make your drink."

He fixed only one, resisting the temptation to take one for himself, presented it with a bad replica of a smile. He turned on the radio for some quiet music, then left softly, without another word to her.

THE day passed so swiftly that the crowding hours seemed to trip over one another. It was a nightmare of faces and mouths and shaking heads. Randolph? Nope, sorry, ain't seen him today. Try the Turkish bath? Nope, sorry, maybe he didn't get swacked last night. Tried the Stork Club? Mr. Randolph? Oh no, he very seldom comes in at the cocktail hour. No, no, no, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry . . . .

It was after seven when Matt rolled to the curb in front of his apartment. He sat wearily hunched behind the wheel for a moment, then slid out of the car. Darkness crouched over the city. Matt plodded up to his apartment, wanting a cold shower, a drink, fresh clothes.

He opened the door and stepped inside. He started across the room, then congealed. Something had whispered, like cloth sliding against cloth. He whirled and caught a momentary glimpse of a snapbrim hat silhouetted against the window, a a black, fastidious mustache, padded square shoulders of a topcoat—then the gun blasted.

He saw the hungry, darting tongue of the second flash, but he did not hear the shot, for he was already falling. It was a fall into nothingness, for he never hit bottom.

He was first conscious of a sharp pain on his right side. He moved and

found he was lying on a fallen chair. He crawled across the room on hands and knees, found the wall and raised himself, an inch at a time. He switched on the light. The pain in his head crashed in flashes, and he leaned against the wall, riding it out.

He lurched into the bathroom, turned on the cold plunge of the shower and stood under it, clothes and all. He began to feel better, but he stayed there until he was able to step out without staggering.

He looked into the mirror over the washbowl. There was a shallow gash that ran across his left forehead and disappeared into his hair. It was bleeding a little, but not much. He took a roll of bandage from the medicine chest, cut off a length, folded it over the gash and taped it on. Then he went into the kitchen and had two fast drinks.

He had a feeling that he should know that man with the black mustache, but his mind wouldn't focus. It kept returning to the same thing —the urgency of getting back to Cathie's apartment. He dressed hurriedly and ran out, thrusting his gun into his topcoat pocket.

She was waiting tensely for him, dressed now in slacks and a sweater. She had on no make-up and her eyes looked enormous in her pale face. She saw the bandage across his forehead.

"Matt!" she cried, and her mouth sagged wide with fear. "What happened, Matt?"

He gave her a wry grin. "Someday," he grumbled, "they're gonna make me mad, taking shots at my noggin. Have you ever seen Howie Moore?"

She thought for a moment, biting her lips. "A little man with very sharp features? I think so. Why, Matt?"

"Did he have a black mustache?"

"A black one, yes. Very glossy. It looked waxed, I thought you knew him, Matt."

"I've just seen him around a few times, but I didn't remember the mustache too clearly. Somebody," he said slowly, "with a black mustache just took a shot at me."

"Not Howie Moore. He's—he's— Could it have been him, Matt?"

HE SHOOK his head. "Nope," he said flatly. "For one, Howie's dead. And for another, that's not the way a squirm like Howie would operate. He's a born blackmailer, from all I've heard, and black-mailers don't shoot. But it could be that somebody's trying to make me believe that *Howie* isn't dead. Sounds like one of the screwy tricks Randolph would dream up. Has he called yet?"

"Not yet." She glanced at the antique banjo clock over the radio. "He still has ten minutes. But, Matt, suppose it was Howie Moore. Suppose he isn't dead. It doesn't make sense, though, does it?"

"He is dead. First, he didn't call me; then the police pick up his car, empty, and can't find Howie; then Randolph has gone into hiding. Then on top of everything else, Randolph's confession of murder makes it pretty damn certain. I'm just waiting . . ."

The phone rang. They looked at one another, frozen. The phone rang again. Cathie pointed toward her bedroom and whispered, "Extension."

Matt jumped for the door. He waited until he saw her reach for the phone, then simultaneously picked up his receiver. Randolph's eager voice came first.

"Cathie? This is Randy. Have you thought it over?"

Her voice was subdued, pleading. "Yes, Randy. I—I'm afraid."

"Afraid of who? That tin-plated detective friend of yours? Listen, duckbumps, I took care of that phony once and I can take care of him again."

"It's so useless, Randy. He won't let you get away with it. And I— I don't want him hurt."

"Who's going to hurt anybody? Come on, get down off your trapeze. Look. They're never going to find Howie Moore, never, so what are you worrying about? If that so-called detective bothers you, I'll slip him a few thousand to look for good old Howie. See how easy it is, duckbumps? Good old Randy thinks of everything. Hell, I'll tell you what. Get hold of that snoop and I'll talk to him tonight. We'll get it settled right away."

Cathie glanced questioningly into the bedroom and Matt nodded violently. She turned thoughtfully back to the phone.

"All right, Randy," she said. "I'll try. Where are you now?"

"At the Mill House, duckbumps. At the good old Mill House. Get on your rocking horse and hurry down here."

He burst into a wild cackle of triumphant laughter. Cathie shuddered and hung up quickly. She looked bleakly at Matt as he strode into the room.

"And I used to think he was nice," she said dully. "Now what, Matt? What's the next move?"

"Where's the Mill House?"

"It's in Bordenton, just across the river."

"Yeah, but where?"

"I'll show you."

"Oh, no you won't!"

"Oh, yes I will," she said with finality. "There won't be any trouble if I go. I can keep him in hand. But what can you do, Matt? He's—he's so very wild."

"I'll tame him," said Matt grimly. "I'll work on him a little."

She made a little gesture of futility, as if she didn't really believe in it, then picked up her mink coat from the chair. She faced him with resignation; she was leaving it up to him now.

She drove the car, but she had nothing to say. She looked worn out and a little bitter. Matt did not try to make her talk.

THE Mill House in Bordenton was actually an old mill that had been remade into a dwelling. The mill stream was still there, and the concrete dam and the deep mill pond. There was a light in one of the windows. It would have been very picturesque and romantic, if there hadn't been that rumbling, sinister undertone.

Cathie looked at it and shivered. She turned to Matt with a kind of despair in her voice and started, "Matt, something bad is going to . . ." But then she saw how set his face was, and she stopped. She swung out of the car.

He followed her up the walk to the door. She pushed it open and he walked into the dark hall ahead of her. He walked very cautiously. There was a sliver of light under the door to his left. He kicked it open and stood there with his hand in his gun pocket.

Randolph looked up from the table, over which he was crouched. He was playing tiddledywinks. He grinned and stood up, unfolding his gangling, raw-boned six feet two. He held up his empty hands.

"Don't shoot, Dan'l," he kept grinning. "I'll come down."

Matt said, "Where's Howie Moore's body, Randolph?"

"Howie Moore? You mean good old Howie Moore from Poughkeepsie? Maybe he went back to Poughkeepsie."

Matt took his hands from his pockets and started across the room toward him. "Where's Howie Moore?" he repeated ominously.

Randolph's grin widened. He started lightly, "Eenie meeney minie . . ."

His jaw dropped. With a wild yell he leaped straight at Matt, his arms outstretched. Matt brought up his fist to the side of his jaw, but Randolph's headlong plunge battered through. Matt staggered wildly from the impact—as the gun

roared like a cannon in that small room.

Randolph took two lurching, wooden steps, his hands pawing feebly. Cathie backed away from him, her face blanched and bleak. Randolph stumbled and fell with his arms doubled under him. Cathie slowly turned her head and looked at Matt.

"Matt!" she said tremulously. "Oh, Matt!"

Matt stared at her. His hands slowly curled into white-knuckled fists. A line of sweat glistened on his upper lip and he licked it off.

"He attacked you, Matt! I was only—"

"You were going to shoot me in the back," he said heavily.

"No, Matt! He jumped at you and I—"

"He jumped at me because he saw you pull the gun. I saw his face. You were going to shoot me in the back."

"Matt, I swear—"

"Why did he want to protect me, Cathie? Want me to tell you? Because he wasn't a murderer and he didn't like murder. He didn't kill Howie Moore. *You did!*"

SHE kept backing away from him until she was against the door frame. Her gun came up until it was centered on his belt buckle. Her mouth was drawn down at the ends. Her eyes were huge and dark.

"I tried to warn you, Matt," she whispered. "I tried to keep you out of this. Why did you have to keep pushing? Why, Matt?"

"I don't like murder," he said. "And I don't like people who murder."

"Killing Howie Moore wasn't murder, Matt." She was pleading with him. "You know the kind of man he was. When he got hold of you, he destroyed you. And, Matt, *Howie Moore was my husband!*"

His eyes spread. "But—why did you kill him?"

"I was trying to live a decent life. He wouldn't let me. He wouldn't let me get a divorce. He just wanted money. He threatened . . ."

Her voice trailed off. Matt was leaning toward her and his grin had the ferocity of self-torment.

"What could he have threatened you with, Cathie?" he asked softly. "With the fact that he was your husband? Would I have cared? Would Randolph have cared? Hell, no! We were both rotting with the love of you. One word from you and I'd have taken care of Howie Moore like that!" He snapped his fingers. "Uh-huh, Cathie. If he threatened, he had a club to beat you with. Do you want me to make a guess, Cathie? Do you want me to tell you?"

"Matt, please listen! You didn't know Howie."

"Nuts, Cathie, nuts! Turn it off. What was the handle he had? You told me yourself. He didn't divorce you. But what did you do, Cathie—marry Randolph anyway? Is that what you did, Cathie?"

Her mouth turned hard. "That's all, Matt," she said coldly. "I did my best to keep you clear. I even took the risk of going to your apartment tonight. Yes, that was I with the black mustache. I hoped if you thought Howie was alive, you'd drop it. You're a fool, Matt. And Randy was another fool. I don't have much luck with my men, do I? If he hadn't followed me around, he would never have seen me shoot Howie, and all this could have been avoided. Men!" her face twisted. "Oh, God, how I hate men! *Keep your hand away from your pocket, Matt!*"

He held out his empty hands and said unpleasantly, "So I am to be number three, is that it?"

"Are you being deliberately stupid?" she asked contemptuously. "You were going to turn me over to the police, weren't you? What did you expect me to do—hold out my arms for the handcuffs?"

Her face was implacable.

A strained parody of a voice said

painfully, "Put down your gun, Cathie." It was barely audible.

CATHIE started and stared in horror. Randolph was stretched out at full length on the floor. He had a gun and he was holding it desperately with both hands. Sweat poured from his face.

"Put it down, Cathie. No more killing," he panted. "Get out of here. I'll hold him till you're gone. Get out of here, Cathie!"

She whirled and fired, and his gun bellowed at almost the same instant. The blow of his bullet slammed her back against the door frame. The gun wilted in her hand. She looked down at her breast, then fearfully raised a trembling hand and touched it. She saw the blood and moaned. She turned as if to walk from the room, then stiffened and fell. She was dead before she hit the floor.

Matt looked from her to Randolph. He yelled and lunged, kicking the gun from Randolph's hand as the man tried to turn it on himself. He went down on one knee beside the man.

"Not for her, boy," he said. "When you have to do it, do it for something that's worth it—and nothing's worth that."

"You don't know. You weren't married to her."

Matt said, "Yeah," then swiftly: "Where's Howie Moore?"

Randolph gestured feebly toward the door. "In the mill pond. I saw her shoot him. She ran back into the night club. I went after her but I lost her. I wasted a lot of time looking. I thought she had gotten a cab, but she must have gone back to Howie Moore's car and driven it out." He stopped and closed his eyes.

"So she brought the body here," Matt prompted him.

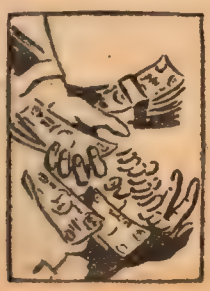
"This is her place," said Randolph, as if that condoned her. "I gave it to her when we were married. It's been in my family for generations, and I gave it to her. Our marriage was a secret. She brought him here. I had that hunch when I saw the car was gone from the parking lot, when I took you up to The Lookout. His car was gone, so she must have moved it. Cathie always had a lot of sense."

Matt said bitterly, "Sense!"

"She brought it up here and put it in the cellar. I weighted it with stones and sank it in the mill pond. It made bubbles. It . . ." he stopped and dropped his face into the crook of his arm, "Oh, Cathie!" he sobbed.

Now there was no pity for the girl left in Matt, but he could not help wondering what she might have been had she not loved money that much.

He rose slowly and walked toward the phone he had seen in the hall. Thank heavens, Randolph was going to pull out of it. Cathie should have been proud to have been married to a guy who had Randolph's fine instincts. Randolph would pull out of it and someday there'd be another girl for him, and she'd be the lucky one. . . .



Tentacles of Caapi

Unique Mystery Novelet

By Arthur J. Burks

CHAPTER I

Strange Potion

AS A private eye, of course I've seen frightened people, but it is seldom that their fear touches me save through the imagination. Doctor Segg Pinero was an exception. His unholy fear of something macabre communicated itself to me almost the instant Betty Kelly, my secretary, ushered him into my office on East Fifty-seventh Street, New York City.

I knew the man at once. His picture had been in the papers quite often for various discoveries he had made in the Amazon Valley, mostly in medicinal plants. He'd gone after them in person, though he was nearing sixty-five, and he'd hit the jackpot. Day by day there had been yarns about one plant or another that showed great possibilities. Then the whole business had stopped abruptly, as if someone had choked it.

Now here was Segg Pinero himself. He didn't offer his hand.

"You're Ross Munster, of course, the private detective," he said. "There should be the usual amenities, but frankly I don't feel up to it. I'm a hideously disturbed man."

I waved him to a chair. He sat

Though the action of this unusual novelet takes place in New York, the idea for it was born deep in the South American Jungle. Adventurer, explorer, gentleman of fortune, Author Burks informs us, "There is such a drug as caapi. Though I have not tried it, natives swear it has the same remarkable effects as I have described in this story."

It was the strangest sleep—and the strangest dreams—a man had ever experienced.

down, then bobbed up quickly. I studied him. He had the shakes for fair. One of the small things for which he was famous was that he looked forty when he was sixty-five. But not any more; he seemed a doddering octogenarian.

I scarcely knew how to handle him. Usually I just hold my tongue, let a prospective client worry himself into my hands. I was afraid to do it with this man. My office is seventeen stories above the street and the open window was right behind Segg Pinero. It wouldn't take much to send him through it, and the reputation of no private detective can endure that kind of publicity.

"Take it easy," I said. "Nothing is ever as bad as it seems!"

It was about as asinine a remark as I had ever made in all my thirty-seven years of life, fifteen of them as a private dick—and I have made some pretty stupid ones.

"I have no judgment left," he said. "I should probably go to the police. If you think I should, after listening to my story, I'll go."

I had to smile, but I made it short.

"I could tell better, maybe," I said, "if you began at the beginning."

He sat down, clung to the arms of the easy chair as if they were some sort of refuge.

"Did you ever hear of *caapi?*" he asked. "But of course you haven't. I didn't know of it myself until Indians led me to it in the Amazon Valley. I collected some of it. I collected too much of it . . ."

THE shakes got him there and he bent forward, head in hands. It was pretty horrible to watch. He fought for control of himself.

"I think," he said, "that I've turned loose some unnameable monster by introducing *caapi* to my colleagues! As you say, though, maybe I'd better start at the beginning. I knew some of the reputed properties of *caapi*, which Indians have used from time immemorial in their pagan rituals. I scouted most of it as sheer superstition.

"The plant produces a sap which, imbibed with tea, milk, coffee or water, causes both old men and young men—and women—to see visions and dream strange dreams. I turned most of my plant stuff over to a laboratory, but I held out the *caapi* because I was curious.

"One night two weeks ago I asked in six of my best friends, all scientific colleagues, and told them what little I knew about *caapi*—which was just what Indians and jungle Brazilians had told me. It amused my friends, no more. I wish I had left it there. But I didn't, or I wouldn't be here."

"What was—or is—the stuff supposed to do?" I asked.

"It causes drinkers to see things. Hallucinations, I thought. But now I don't know. It isn't something that science can admit, yet what I am telling you is gospel truth. The tea of *caapi* is supposed to make the drinker able to see people at a distance, to look into their affairs and know just what they are doing at a given moment!"

I laughed. I couldn't help it. I thought it might steady him a little, for he was so close to the screaming meemies it simply wasn't funny.

"Just a moment," he said. "Remember, we all laughed—*before* the experiment! We decided—after we all agreed to keep our mouths shut, since a newspaper story to the effect that six men of importance in the field of science had gone on a *caapi* jag would discredit us everywhere—to make a test. I did know that the *caapi* was not toxic, so there was no hesitation about drinking the tea."

He hesitated again.

"We sat at my dinner table," he went on, "exactly as we had sat for dinner. My cook had cleared the place and left us—with a pot of tea on a doily in the middle of the table. The cook wasn't curious, being accustomed to strange things in my place. I powdered some of the leaves of

caapi and dropped it into the teapot, gave it a chance to steep. I allowed something like five minutes. We would all get about the same amount of it that way, and therefore the same effect.

"Then I poured. We all drank, as if toasting one another. The stuff tasted pungent, not unpleasant, quite the contrary. Nothing happened as we kept on sipping. Nothing happened until we all had drained our cups and had given it up as a bad job. Then it hit us!"

Again that curious hesitation, as if he searched somewhere for strength to go on. His deep-sunken eyes were haunted.

"The first effect was a feeling of general hilarity, as if each of us had taken about one more than a scientist should. Then Doctor Raymond Chance . . ."

I had been leaning back. When I heard the name of Doctor Chance I hunched myself forward intently.

"You mean Doctor Raymond Chance, the pathologist?" I demanded. "The one who died ten days ago under mysterious circumstances? The police are investigating—"

He held up his hand.

"As sure as I'm sitting here, I murdered Doctor Chance!" he asserted.

His statement hit me like a mule kick in the belly. It's not so good having clients who confess murder, details of which they have kept from the police.

"Oh, I didn't stab, strike or poison him," he explained, "but if he hadn't drunk *caapi* tea in my quarters he would be alive today, I'm sure."

I let my held breath out slowly, feeling a little relieved but by no means out of the woods.

"I guess I'd better hear the details of this *caapi* jag," I said quietly. "Or better still, just usher you to the door and forget you came!"

"I am prepared to pay any fee you ask," he said quickly. "But if you refuse to listen, I don't believe even you could get between me and that window."

SO HE'D taken that window into consideration. I saw I would have to be very careful in how I handled him.

"For my own part," he went on describing the effects of the *caapi*, "I stared at my colleagues. After the first burst of laughter we all became serious, feeling something unholy, hideous, stirring inside us, both in our stomachs and our brains. I watched my friends' faces take on, first, silly, idiotic expressions, which changed quickly to expressions of almost absolute blankness—if blankness can be called an expression. Their eyes remained fixed as in hypnotic sleep. They all seemed to be looking far away, to something their physical eyes couldn't possibly see!"

I shivered a little. I'm not superstitious, but I don't like spook stuff.

"Then I realized that I was looking into the minds and lives of my friends!" said Segg Pinero. "I stared at each in turn and what I saw made me quite sick. If what I saw were true, for instance, all six of those men were insanely envious of me and what I had just done in the Amazon Valley. And two of them, even then, were wondering if it were possible to murder me and make it seem an accident!"

I wanted to interrupt because the look in Pinero's face was not good for my morale. Yet when I asked myself if he were mad, the answer was negative. Just a terribly frightened man, a man who had aged fifteen years in as many days and nights.

"I don't know how long the thing lasted," he went on, "for there was no sense of time while I was under the influence of *caapi*. But it was deep enough to lose mental and spiritual control of my ego, and I forgot to look at the clock afterward. One by one each of us came awake. Raymond Chance was awake, apparently in possession of all his faculties, when I

came around. He looked deathly sick. His eyes had horror in them.

"As I look at the matter now I feel as if all of us where led by a group of demons—in which stuff no scientist can believe!—or we'd have called the whole thing off. I didn't wish to tell the others what I had 'seen,' of course, and the same curious reluctance was obvious in each of my six colleagues.

"It was Doctor Chance who made the proposal which started the series of tragic events. He said he had 'seen' something at a distance, so clearly, so precisely, that he felt he'd like to check it by writing a letter. He did tell us to whom the letter was going: Doctor Frederick Lawson, of Washington, D. C.!"

I don't often swear. I swore now, deeply, feelingly.

"Don't tell me," I said. "Doctor Frederick Lawson, who jumped to his death from Hotel Capitol, in Washington, D. C., about thirteen days ago. Suicide, of course, but the note he left behind was strange. It said—let me see . . ."

" 'Nothing is ever hidden, however deeply buried!' " quoted Doctor Segg Pinero. "That meant nothing to anybody, really, certainly not to Lawson's family. But it meant something to Doctor Chance, who came to me as soon as he received a reply to the letter he had written Lawson—as a result of the *caapi* drinking, remember? Doctor Chance wrote to Lawson simply that he had 'seen' him doing something—I must bury that deep, for it has become a professional confidence—with a lock box in a Washington bank vault. Chance went into detail.

"Lawson wrote him—offering him fifty thousand dollars if he would remain silent! He took it that Chance was blackmailing him. Chance, frightened, wrote back to Lawson at once, telling him that the fifty thousand didn't interest him, that the whole thing was a gag . . ."

Segg Pinero gulped, simply could not continue for a few moments.

"Result," I said, "Doctor Lawson, more scared than before, did the Dutch—killed himself!"

Segg Pinero nodded. He got up, started toward the window, not, I thought, that he planned going out; he simply couldn't sit still any longer. I got out of my chair fast and stepped to the window, beating him to it. I stood with my back to it and stared at Segg Pinero.

"I think," I said, "that you'd better give me the names of the other scientists who imbibed *caapi* with you."

"All were—or are—doctors of the Natural Sciences," he said. "I've named Doctor Chance. The others were Crome Leighty, Peter Hellman, Frank Angstrum, Joel Ney and Roger Armitage."

I LET my breath out in a soft whistle. I knew every name, and I don't chase the famous. I knew them as the world knew them. They had carried Natural Science into most American homes. Of the five persons named, two were dead. That made three of the original six.

Crome Leighty had dropped dead on Fifth Avenue a week ago—heart failure, the medical examiner said; Joel Ney had stepped off a subway station ahead of a train. The latter was an "accident," of course, though questions had been asked as to how come Ney used the subway when he hadn't done so, to the knowledge of his own family, in fifteen years. I was beginning to see why Segg Pinero was agitated.

"I gather," he went on finally, "that my colleagues communicated with their 'quarries' in some detail, for checking purposes, and hit the facts so accurately on the head that nothing would convince the victims that they hadn't been watched in the act of doing one of those strange things we are all likely to do, which we never expect anyone, even God, to know about. When my colleagues received answers to letters, some of those answers threatened their lives. Others offered hush money . . ."

He choked up again, sat down, but I stayed close to the window, just in case.

"Now let me add a bit of deduction," I said. "Your colleagues, when they realized that your experiment had led into forbidden byways, sat down and wrote each 'quarry' in detail, explaining just what it was all about, the story of *caapi*, and the bender you all went on a couple of weeks ago."

He nodded.

"Thus turning the attention of all those 'quarries,'" I suggested, "on *you!* Maybe you know, and maybe you don't, who the others were besides Lawson . . ."

"Several colleagues," he went on, "saw 'visions' of lives of more than one of their friends and wrote to each of them. So at least a dozen of the 'prying'—to say the least!—letters went out. Of that number only three or four regarded the thing as interesting but innocuous, more or less of a good joke. The others blew up. One odd fact attaches to the men who didn't get upset over the letters: all are poor! The wealthy ones went more or less, though politely, berserk."

"Solving your problems," I interpolated, "should be simple. All I have to do is drink *caapi* tea!"

"I've destroyed every last speck of it!" he said.

"Then as far as I know this whole business may be a figment of your imagination. I prefer to think it is."

"Maybe you'll think differently when you see these letters," he said. "I understand that your work is confidential, even if you refuse a case. I looked you up carefully. That's why it has taken me over two weeks to start action. I had to be sure."

He took a large envelope from an inner pocket, tendered it to me. I opened it. It contained other, smaller envelopes. Several of the smaller envelopes contained money in bills, cash. The smallest denomination was five hundred dollars!

I looked at the first letter. Fear and hatred beside which the fear exuding from Segg Pinero was as nothing, fairly oozed from that first communication.

I knew I had a case. I might not live to solve it, but if I did I'd never forget a single detail of it.

CHAPTER II

Night Vision

"I'M GOING to help you," I said, "but I don't stand for much nonsense. I may get rough with people. When I ask questions from you, I want answers with nothing held back."

I made a quick calculation. I'd need a lot of expense money for operatives working in half a dozen cities east of the Mississippi.

"My fee will be five thousand dollars," I went on, "and ten thousand for expenses. There may be more expenses later, I don't know. If there are less, I'll refund the difference."

I touched the money, mixed up with the fright letters he had given me, with a forefinger.

"I don't care for this kind of money," I said, "so you'd better give me a check."

I thought he'd hand me the expense money and a retainer, or that he'd bellow like a bull because he had to kick in with anything before he saw results. No. He gave me a check for fifteen thousand dollars. I pushed a button and Betty Kelly came in, took the check.

"Telephone and see if it's okay," I said, not caring if Segg Pinero heard me.

She went out. Segg Pinero didn't seem to care one way or the other. I knew he was rich, but fifteen grand is still a lot of money.

"Now, doctor," I went on, "I don't believe for one moment you destroyed all that *caapi*. It just isn't in the cards. I want it!"

"I assure you I wouldn't allow an-

other speck of it to be taken by anyone!" His voice quavered with emotion. "I've had enough of it. No telling what might happen if any more were used."

I was thumbing through the telephone book. I gave a number to my secretary. It was Segg Pinero's own. He looked at me in amazement. His cook answered.

"I'm speaking for Doctor Pinero," I said to her. "He wishes you to get the package of plants marked *caapi*, call a messenger and send them to his office at once."

"How strange!" said a gentle voice. "He took that one with him this morning . . . Who is this, anyway?"

But I hung up on her. Then I stepped in front of the doctor, held out my hand. I was pretty sore: I had warned the fellow.

"The *caapi* stuff," I said, holding out my hand. "Give!"

He got to his feet, his eyes wild.

"I swear to you I haven't—" he began, when I made one of those moves which I always regret later but which are so often necessary with people who are so harassed they won't come clean.

I caught him by the lapels of his coat, lifted him from the seat, and started to give him a fast frisk. I found I had a wildcat by the tail. Maybe this man looked like an octogenarian, but he hadn't lost much of the strength which had made it possible for him to endure unbelievable hardships in various parts of the world.

He tied into me like a madman. I felt his nails bite into my cheeks. He balled his hands into fists—when he saw blood on my face, I guess—and started smashing at my nose, reaching for my jaw.

I had my hands full with him. I thought he was doing all this in desperation, of course, and had the feeling that it was just a feint until he could break away and get to the window. My thinking, maybe, was all awry on this business.

I didn't want to hurt the man. He was so much older than I. But I didn't want him jumping out the window or pushing me out, and I did want to know the lowdown on *caapi*. If he wouldn't give voluntarily, he had to be treated just like common thugs who didn't.

WE KNOCKED over some furniture. Betty Kelly came in, looked, withdrew. This thing had happened before in her time and she preferred not to watch. I knew that she had taken down every word that had passed between Pinero and me, for that was her job, and I wondered how she would record the details of this fight.

I hated to do it, like I say, but I began palming and backhanding Pinero across the cheeks. He collapsed eventually like a pricked toy balloon. I maneuvered him around to the chair, pushed him into it, held him there. I was panting harder than he was.

I went into his pockets. I got a small paper packet from his vest. It even had the name written on it: *caapi!* I sat down, unrolled the packet. Segg Pinero sat in the chair and sobbed.

"For the love of God!" he said. "Don't use the stuff, do you hear? There has been enough trouble. I can't have you seeing the lives of my friends . . ."

"If you think I believe this, you're crazy!" I said. "Go on home now and behave yourself until you hear from me. You can always get me here if you need me. Leave word with Betty Kelly."

He rose, passed by the front of the desk while I watched him warily. He never once glanced at the open window. He was cowed, beaten. At the door he turned.

"My life is in danger and you don't even mention it!" he said.

"You won't be out of sight of one of my operatives from the time you leave this building until this thing is washed up," I told him. "There'll be

someone close enough to you to keep you alive, never worry."

That had to suit him. I had signaled Betty to have Nate Harse, one of my best shadows, pick Segg Pinero up outside the office. He could live in his house for all of me. He didn't have to be subtle.

As soon as he was gone I got busy. I've got connections where I need them, including the Detective Bureau of the New York Police. I'm not one of those gents who are always showing up the police. I work with them pretty closely.

One of the men I telephoned was Detective Lieutenant Zeb Minas, who always gets credit for things I work out for him and with him, and who plays along with me for that reason—and keeps other dicks and coppers out of my hair. I asked Zeb to drop in on me.

When he arrived I was still telephoning other private detective agencies around the country, hiring operatives and putting shadows on every last one of the men whose names Segg Pinero had given me. As far as that went, by the time Zeb Minas was comfortably settled in my office, one of my cigars in his face, his heels on my smooth desk, the thing was well in hand.

No member of the group united by experiences with *caapi*, so far known to Segg Pinero—if he had given me all of the names!—was free of surveillance. I told Betty Kelly to keep a record of every call that came in from my small army of operatives if they started coming in while Zeb was with me. I sat and spoke to Zeb.

"Is your department interested in the deaths of Doctors Chance, Lawson, Ney and Crome Leighty?" I demanded.

His eyebrows went up. "Chance, yes," he said, "and Ney, yes. But the other two—"

"Same thing," I said. "I've been retained. I'm going to spill the works, with names, under the usual secrecy agreement, until we break the case. Then you can run with it."

I held nothing back, once he had given me the nod. I didn't expect to work right beside him, for I didn't work that way. Private dicks have to stay private to accomplish much.

"You're in," he said, getting to his feet. "I'll drop in every day or so about lunch hour, or you call me when you've a contribution."

"Don't make it the lunch hour," I said. "Buy your own lunch."

"And you on a swindle sheet?" he said. "Make it the lunch hour!"

I had to agree. The man is sometimes imperturbable. He likes thick steaks for lunch. They cost money.

IT WAS near dark when he left me. I told Betty to tell our answering service to answer for us, then to go home, but not to go out because I might need her. She knew that meant a bonus even if I didn't call her.

I stepped into a room behind my office where I often have to sleep when I'm on a case, and where I keep coffee and tea things. Not that I'm strong for tea. I felt I was a fool for trying out the *caapi*, for it might well be poison, yet why should Segg Pinero, out of a clear sky, bring me poison—and then fight me like a wildcat to keep me from taking it—if it were to be planted to kill me? He had no motive I could even guess at.

I took a chance, though I kept emetics in my medicine cabinet. None of them might be worth anything against strange toxics, but—well, as I say, I took a chance.

I brewed some tea. I powdered some of the *caapi* between my palms. It looked a little like green tea, and for my money, up to then, that's what it was. Even to the fragrance. I dropped it into the tea as soon as the water was hot. I locked the door to my office, just in case.

I sat down—a bit jittery, I admit, because I kept seeing the horror in the face of Doctor Segg Pinero—and began sipping the mixture. After all,

my plans called for killing considerable time and I might as well do it this way.

I sipped an entire cup of tea. Nothing happened. But Segg Pinero had said it sneaked up on you. I set down the cup, waiting for it to hit. I waited half an hour, an hour—and absolutely nothing whatever happened.

It was, I must admit, the first time I really liked tea, but that was all the *caapi*, if that's what it was, contributed. I gave it plenty of time, then set the alarm clock every good dick carries inside his head, for eleven o'clock, and spread myself on my couch for some sleep.

I had a nightmare. It was based solely on the fact that Frank Angstrum, Limnologist, was first on my list for nocturnal visitation. He was one of the survivors of the strange case of the *caapi* leaves. In my nightmare I saw a hooded form sneak into his bedroom, hold a pillow over his face, keep it there until he stopped moving around. The hooded form was a man, said my nightmare, and a strong one, for Angstrum was big and young.

The nightmare was so vivid that it snapped me awake—to realize that the thing was just another way my subconscious had of ringing my mental alarm clock. It was eleven p.m. and time for me to get going. I wondered, as I got out of there, why the *caapi* hadn't worked for me. I also wondered if the entire story hadn't been hooey.

Then I remembered the fifteen grand check, the proceeds of which was now part of my own bank account. The answer probably was that I didn't have the *caapi*.

Frank Angstrum's bedroom, which I had never visited, was indicated in my dream in vivid detail. I chuckled over it, amused too, that the man in the nightmare should be hooded.

Entering, though not recommended and to be avoided whenever possible, is one thing the private dick must be able to do. I was. Betty had sent operatives to the houses of *caapi* victims in New York. They'd got key impressions for me and she'd had the keys made. One of my men left them on the desk in my office. I took them all, for I intended to use them all. Each had a piece of paper on it, giving the name of the place it fitted.

I picked out the one with Angstrum's name on it.

HIS place was on Riverside Drive. I got there by taxicab. Getting in was a cinch. A dick gets so he knows houses. I had a pencil flash. There were people still awake inside, for I heard laughter; but it was a large home and I had no trouble avoiding them. I made a guess as to which bedroom on the second floor would be Angstrum's. I missed twice but clicked the third time.

I let myself in, locked the door behind me, listened. I couldn't hear breathing, but I didn't care much whether Angstrum was here or not. I wanted to frisk his place, that was all. If there was any information on his "victims"—that is, men who had received letters as a result of the *caapi* experiment—the chances were that it would be here. Anyway, it was a place to start. Not hearing his breathing made me remember the nightmare. I fumbled for the bed, fumbled over it. Nobody was in it.

I went back to the door, decided to chance turning on the electric light switch. The bedroom looked too much as it had looked in my nightmare for peace of mind, but I figured I must have seen a picture of it somewhere. Everything connected with Angstrum had often been photographed.

I was deeply interested in the contents of Angstrum's desk when the bedroom light went out, filling the room with darkness, and something charged me like a mad bull. I knew I had to do with a blackjack and brass knuckles even before a stunning blow on the chin drove me to my knees, and another wallop spread me on the floor.

I had never in my life been hit so hard and so often. I tried to get up. I tried to get my flash beam on my attacker's face. It was no good. The attack had been too much of a surprise, too utterly ferocious.

The sap did it. I felt as if my head were split wide open across the top and all my brains were boiling out. Immediately I sank into the blackest oblivion.

I regained consciousness long later, with a headache beyond description. I was a little surprised that the lights were on. I looked around for my attacker. Why hadn't the police been called? Certainly I was an intruder!

My eyes didn't focus very well—until they really got something on which to focus!

I looked at the bed. Lying there as if peacefully asleep, where I had felt for him but could not find him in the dark, was Frank Angstrum! I could not hear him breathing. He reminded me too much of my nightmare for comfort. But the nightmare could mean nothing, no connection with the effects of *caapi*, if Angstrum had got his *after* I had the nightmare.

I dragged myself to my knees, then to my feet. I looked at my watch. It was one-thirty in the morning. I could hear nothing in the house. Nobody appeared to have come to ask about the streak of light which must have been showing under the door for hours. Maybe the family of Angstrum was accustomed to late hours on the part of the doctor. Scientists were sometimes queer cattle, I knew.

I looked down at Angstrum's face, not altogether surprised yet shocked for all that, to see that he was dead—with not a mark on him. I've seen victims of suffocation. He looked like one. But I didn't believe it. I was trying to make my nightmare fit what I was seeing. I touched the corpse. It was cold. Could Angstrum have been dead when I arrived here? Before I had the nightmare? If so, the *caapi* . . .

I swore softly. I lifted the handset of the telephone, whispered Zeb Minas's number, got him the first crack.

Guardedly I told him approximately what had happened. Each word made my head split again.

"Phone Angstrum's house," I suggested. "Insist on talking to him. That will make them discover the body. Then you can go on from there. I've got a nightmare to follow!"

He chuckled. I didn't feel like chuckling. I turned out the lights, slipped into the hallway of a house perfectly dark. I got outside without mishap, crossed Riverside Drive to spend a little time in a park, watching the Angstrum residence. I expected to see lights come on all over the place. I expected to hear a police siren as Zeb Minas came on the run to check on the result of his telephone call.

Lights *did* come on briefly in the Angstrum residence, but they went out almost at once.

I waited half an hour, but no police siren sounded anywhere along the drive!

I got another taxi, not so easy that late, and headed fast for the residence of Roger Armitage.

CHAPTER III

Haystack Needles

NO PRIVATE dick, no man for that matter, ever becomes completely accustomed to going through houses at night, houses in which people are asleep, knowing all the time that if he gets filled with lead there's no comeback. A man's house is his castle. Dead burglars who turn out to be private detectives are still just dead burglars as far as the law is concerned, and it doesn't matter to the dead whether it's the law or not.

I had four houses to frisk, besides that of Segg Pinero. To make matters worse, I didn't know just what I was after. I was hunting clues, needles in haystacks, trying to solve murders

which might not be murders at all. I was chasing wild geese expecting them to turn into golden swans.

I was trying to earn five grand. Of course I could have sat back and waited for an accounting on strangers I'd placed under surveillance. But even if one or two were unaccounted for, and were proved to have had time and opportunity to kill Angstrum, who knew but that letters might have gone out to a dozen more strangers whose names Segg Pinero did not even suspect?

And what had happened at the Angstrum home? How come Zeb Minas hadn't followed up my telephone call? Had he phoned the Angstrum residence, asked to speak to the scientist? If anyone had gone to summon Angstrum to the phone, they'd have found Angstrum dead in bed, as I had left him.

But why hadn't the house come alive then, and become hysterical, as it should have if murder were abed in the master's corner?

The more I thought of it, the more it troubled me. Angstrum hadn't been in bed when I entered his bedroom. I hadn't heard the door open behind me, and I've had too much experience to have it happen to me by surprise —that brass knuckles and blackjack business.

Who had it been? Where had Angstrum been? For, just stop and think a minute: if Angstrum had entered that room alive after I was knocked cold, he would have been sure to see me lying beside his bed. Would he have lain down quietly? And if he had done so, would his murderer have left me lying there, *alive?*

I began to suspect, as I approached the Armitage house on Washington Square, that I was operating right then on *caapi* and that there was no sense to the way things were going. For it was obvious—if what Segg Pinero had told me about *caapi* was true—that my nightmare was not *caapi*-induced, in spite of my subsequent familiarity with Angstrum's bedroom.

Why not? Simple: I'd have been able to identify the man in the hood in spite of the hood. If I could "see" across town and through the walls of a house, I could "see" a man through a black hood. So what I had dreamed had been just what I believed it was —my subconscious scaring me awake at eleven o'clock, the time I'd set my mental alarm clock.

And I was supposed to have a man watching the Angstrum residence. Where had he been? Betty could have slipped up on that detail, of course, but she never had before. She always saw that my orders were carried out perfectly. Something must have pulled my man away—or the *caapi* was just now getting to work on me.

I went through the Armitage house, just hunting. I knew that private papers of importance would probably be kept in lock boxes somewhere, but my experience was that fearful things men liked to keep near them, so they could run with them if there was trouble. I was looking for *caapi*, also. I had found some at Angstrum's.

I found none in the house of Armitage. I looked down on the sleeping man's face, and when I got outside I picked up my stake-out and gave him the key, told him to get into Armitage's bedroom and stay there until Armitage wakened or he was relieved.

Armitage, of the six names Segg Pinero mentioned, and Hellman, were the only ones left alive. Probably they were due for murder, too. I should have known that Angstrum was doomed, but I hadn't suspected—mostly because I doubted all this *caapi* stuff.

It hadn't worked on me, had it, unless it were working now? In a way that the explanation of Segg Pinero hadn't prepared me for!

I FOUND, in Armitage's papers, a carbon of the letter he had written to a Sidney Heimer, one of the "vic-

tims" of the *caapi* experiment. I noted the address, in Minneapolis, and noted what Armitage had "accused" him of. The thing turned me cold inside, and I made up my mind to check very carefully on Sidney Heimer—if Armitage were murdered in spite of all I could do.

The carbon copy proved some of Segg Pinero's story, anyway.

I went through the houses and apartments of both the quick and the dead. In two more—the homes of recently dead men, Crome Leighty and Joel Ney—I found copies of letters written as part of the *caapi* experiment, one of the "copies" being upside down and backward on a blotter. I took the two names.

There was no reason for taking them, I felt, for they were the names and addresses of people living a long way off, and I had tails on both of them. Yet the two men who had written these letters were dead, Ney, at least, in mysterious circumstances, under the wheels of a subway train, on which he had not ridden in fifteen years!

I went to the apartment of Segg Pinero last of all. I checked with Nate Harse, the man I had watching him.

"Has Segg Pinero been out since midnight?" I asked.

"No, chief," he said.

"You been awake the whole time?" I persisted.

"Of course!" he said vehemently. "It isn't a stake-out so I let the help know I was around. The doctor told me to make myself at home. And his cook, or some other servant, has been bringing me coffee every hour on the hour since ten o'clock. They're all a little scared here, and I'm keeping an eye out for visitors bent on murder."

Well, one possible suspect was in the clear. It couldn't be Segg Pinero, not with my man on him. Besides, if Segg Pinero were a murderer—I was acutely conscious that he had accused himself of murdering Doctor Chance—why had he ever come to me? Of course, he had used two weeks to check on me. I wondered how he had done it without my knowledge, what private detective agency he must have used.

Had he found out my more or less secret connection with Detective Lieutenant Zeb Minas?

I gulped when all the potentialities of that began suggesting themselves to me.

Then I harked back to my nightmare, the strange way things had gone — or had *not* gone — at Angstrum's; I thought of Nate Harse, whom I'd put on as tail on Segg Pinero, and the coffee, every hour on the hour. In here somewhere was the answer to something.

I went back to Harse.

"Didn't drop off to sleep any time, did you, Nate?" I asked.

He hesitated, and my heart began hammering a bit faster.

"No, I didn't go to sleep," he said, "but a strange thing happened around midnight, or maybe earlier. I keep looking at my watch. You know, time passes awfully slow on one of these jobs—every minute a half hour long. Well, chief, I lost a whole hour somewhere. I had just looked at my watch and it was eleven thirty-seven. I resolved not to look again *too* soon, and managed to hold off what I believed to be at least fifteen minutes. Then I looked again. The time was twelve forty-eight! I never misjudged time so badly in my life."

I thought that over a minute, nodded to him, then left.

I went back to the office, checked on messages left with the answering service. Every *caapi* victim outside of New York was under surveillance and had been since about an hour after I got busy on the telephone. No one of whom I knew—to whom the scientists had written as part of their *caapi* test—had been in town tonight. None of them could have murdered Angstrum. None of them could possibly get in and murder Hellman or Armitage.

Hellman! I hadn't contacted him

myself but I did have his apartment covered.

It was four o'clock in the morning, but I didn't let that bother me. I telephoned Hellman, made him identify himself, identified myself, felt relieved that he was alive—and asked him to come to my office at nine o'clock.

Then, I thought, I'd better telephone Zeb Minas.

I hated to get him out again tonight.

He didn't let me. My telephone rang. It was Minas.

"Have you gone completely nuts?" he asked me. "What's this stuff about Angstrum? I telephoned, just as you suggested—"

"And they put him on the telephone," I said calmly, now sure of my ground. "You satisfied yourself that it *was* Angstrum?"

"I went out," he said, "and *talked* to him! I *know* it was Angstrum! I've had business with him before."

"I wonder who the dead man was?" I said.

"*If* there was a dead man!" he retorted. "And if you weren't on one of your *caapi* binges!"

"The man I touched and found cold," I said, "the man on the bed, was Doctor Angstrum! Look, Zeb, do something, will you? Come to my office at nine tomorrow morning. Bring Angstrum with you!"

"After this nightmare of yours," he said, "why should I?"

"That's right, why should you? I'll telephone and ask him myself!"

"I'll bring him," he said. "But what'll happen?"

"I'll give you a murderer!" I assured him, not too confidently.

CHAPTER IV

Smoke of Illusion

BY THE time Angstrum, Minas, Pinero, Armitage and Hellman were in my office at nine next morning, I had eliminated all of the *caapi* "victims." That is, the men who had received letters from the *caapi* experimenters. My shadows, out around the Eastern States, had done the work for which they would be paid well—practically all of Pinero's ten grand, but worth it.

Segg Pinero looked about as frightened as he had before. Hellman was frankly indignant, said he wasn't going to stay unless—with a glance at Minas—he was supposed to be under arrest.

"If you don't stay, Doctor Hellman," I said, "the chances are that you will be dead before the day's end!"

"Nonsense!" he exploded. "You people see murder and destruction behind every bush." But he said no more about leaving.

I sat. Minas started to put his feet on my desk, as usual, but stopped. I looked from face to face.

"The murderer of three men," I said, "is in this room!"

I wasn't sure of that, couldn't prove it, but I could look at faces as I said it and see what they reflected.

"One man here, some weeks ago, held a most unusual meeting of scientists. Present there were the host, Doctor Pinero, Doctors Angstrum, Armitage, Ney, Hellman, Leighty and Chance. The meeting was held for the purpose of making an unofficial test of a South American medicinal plant called *caapi*."

I paused, expecting some protest, some interruption, for surely everybody here knew about that dinner and what followed it. Nobody said anything. But I had their attention.

"Two weeks after that," I went on, "when one doctor—not one of those named above—had killed himself and two others had died under mysterious circumstances, Doctor Pinero came to me and reported the details of the meeting, asked me to help him. He felt, he said, that he was a murderer, the murderer of at least one of the dead — Doctor Chance — but everything else he said indicated he be-

lived that he was responsible for the others as well."

Pinero was shaking, clinging to the arms of the chair to make himself stop. I knew he was aching to protest, mostly because he didn't want to live through it again, even as a recital of events.

"No sooner had Doctor Pinero begun telling me the story, having retained me and given me my fee in advance," I said, "than he began opposing me. For instance, he didn't wish me to have a sample of *caapi*. His refusal, which resulted in a fight with me, was so bitter that I couldn't help believing in the efficiency of *caapi*, or that Pinero believed in it—or was doing a fine acting job to make me believe it! So I took a packet off him bearing the name *caapi*. I tried it out that same night, last night, with absolutely no effect whatever!"

Pinero's mouth dropped open. As a register of surprise it was superb.

"Before taking the stuff from him," I went on, "I telephoned his house and his cook answered. I understand it was his cook because I believe that's the only woman in his house. She told me, when I asked, that he had taken the *caapi* with him that morning. Would a cook be likely even to know about it? Would she, unless Doctor Pinero told her because he had a hunch she might be asked? It was necessary for Doctor Pinero to *prove* that the stuff was *caapi*. If it was, and had no effect on me, his story of 'seeing' the secrets of people was out. If it wasn't *caapi* then a switch had been pulled for some reason I had to find out."

"Are you getting around to accusing me of murder?" demanded Pinero.

"Haven't you accused yourself?" I asked.

"Yes. Morally, but not legally. I didn't mean I had actually premeditated and then *committed* murder!"

"I'm not accusing you further than you have accused yourself—*yet!*" I snapped at him. "However, who started all this? You did, Doctor Pinero. You brought me all of the letters, the hush money. You not only retained me but paid me my full fee. That was a little anxious, wasn't it?"

"The other scientists had been threatened and two of those who took *caapi* with me were dead!" said Pinero. "Why wouldn't I have been anxious? And tell me this: if the finger of suspicion were pointing at me, why would I come to *you*, or anyone, who has virtual police powers?"

"It's an ancient trick," I said, "rarely used any more, that the murderer himself finds the body, reports to the police, and even helps run down a mythical murderer. It happens because murderers think it's a new wrinkle. Just the same, you are a clever man, doctor, and I admit I couldn't see any sense in that—for *you!* Then you gave me two hints!"

HE STARED at me, looked from face to face of the others. They were all staring at him except Zeb Minas, who was watching me like a hawk.

"It was true, as you told me, doctor," I said, "that you had been checking up on me for two weeks?"

"I had to have someone I could trust. I had many other agencies investigated at the same time."

"Did you also check on the working habits of Detective Lieutenant Minas?"

He started to jump to his feet. "Of course not! Why should I?"

"Because, while investigating *him*, rather than me," I said, "you discovered that he and I often worked hand in glove. You investigated Minas because he was the detective in charge of the investigation into the deaths of Chance and Ney. He was coming quite too close to you for comfort. So when you found, or believed you had found, that he places unusual trust in me—"

Minas snorted loudly, but I waved aside the interruption and continued to address Pinero.

"You retained me, gave me the whole story—and paid the entire fee because you felt that if I found out anything against you, fifteen thousand dollars would be too much for me to return. Now you had a perfectly good motive for coming to me with the story. How does it sound?"

"It sounds reasonable, if true," said Pinero. "But I had no idea that Lieutenant Minas was getting close to me, nor did I investigate him."

"I've checked with agencies which don't co-operate with him very well," I said. "They claim you did. So now you have a good reason for contacting me, for yelling murder when you're the murderer—*if* you are! Everything centered around you. But let's switch back to something else. You had the best of motives to kill your colleagues, at least two of them, whom you did not name save as 'two of the six men at the table.' Were Chance and Ney those two men, Doctor? I mean the two men into whose minds you looked while influenced by drinking *caapi*, to find that both thought of murdering you out of envy?

"Think now, you were scared stiff when you realized what *caapi* had done to so many people. Two men were out to kill you, if *caapi* visioned the truth. You felt it must when Lawson killed himself and letters started coming in with hush money in them. So, you killed Chance and Ney, in ways that couldn't be spotted—you felt."

Pinero hesitated. I was giving him a workout I'd not have liked to go through myself. Sweat beaded his forehead.

"I tried the *caapi*, or what purported to be *caapi*, the night of the day I took your case, doctor—last night in fact. I didn't 'see visions and dream dreams' but I did have a nightmare which wakened me, in which I saw a hooded man in Doctor Angstrum's bedroom, bending over Doctor Angstrum and smothering him with a pillow. I tried in the nightmare to make out the features of the hooded man—and knew when I wakened that it *was* nightmare, not *caapi* 'vision', else I'd have seen the man through the hood."

I went on, explaining what I had experienced in the house of Doctor Angstrum, none of which seemed to surprise Doctor Angstrum.

"I regained consciousness," I went on, "in Angstrum's bedroom to find Angstrum, as I believed, lying stiff, cold, and dead, in his bed."

ANGSTRUM snorted. Hellman expressed disgust. Here I was, a smart dick, and didn't know a dead man when I touched him.

"I thought he was dead, anyway," I stated. "I visited the houses and apartments of you other gentlemen, looking for *caapi* and whatever else I could find. I found complete confirmation of everything Doctor Pinero had informed me. It will stand up in court, too. Then I visited Doctor Pinero's house, to find out whether he could have been absent during the time Angstrum had apparently been murdered.

"I found he could have been, in spite of my operative, Nate Harse! Your cook, doctor, gave my man coffee, and *caapi*, at more or less regular intervals. When you were ready to go out—if that's the way it was done—and kill Angstrum, you simply walked past him."

"Since Angstrum isn't dead," said Pinero with more assurance in his voice, "I fancy it's silly for me to answer that."

"But you *could* have!" I said. "Now, gentlemen, here is another curious thing which happened at about the same time. I didn't find my operative who was watching over Doctor Angstrum, either when I went to the house or when I came away later. His name doesn't matter but he, like Nate Harse, reported to me a queer loss of time during his watch. The time he lost, and the time lost by Nate Harse, were about the same. Now, I go back to Doctor Angstrum . . ."

I stared at the man for a few moments. He smiled at me.

"Notice," he said, "that I am not dead!"

"True," I said, "you are not dead. But to all intents and purposes you were, when I awakened in your bedroom after taking a brutal brass knuckles and blackjack drubbing!"

Now I had to be very, very careful.

"I realized something when I tried to make the apparent 'death' of Doctor Angstrum make sense," I said, "until I understood that the very thing it was intended *not* to do was make sense! If it didn't make sense, how would I ever pin murder on Doctor Angstrum?"

There were sounds of general surprise. Here I was, building up a case against Pinero, then suddenly switching to Angstrum. Angstrum snorted. He snapped a cigarette case open, took a cigarette, did not shake in the least as he struck a match. I continued quietly.

"When Lieutenant Minas explained the lack of hysteria in the Angstrum residence, after I thought the 'body' should have been discovered, I put some more *caapi* bits together. Here they are: I slept like a log for two hours after taking what I believed to be *caapi*. Two of my operatives 'lost' about an hour each out of their lives. And Doctor Pinero, reporting the original *caapi* jag to me, also took note of a queer time lapse.

"So it came to me: Under *caapi* to the limit, every person we know of connected with it, having imbibed too much, was literally knocked *cold!* In other words, as a result of excessive use of *caapi*, something akin to suspended animation or a cataleptic trance—when even to a doctor a person seems actually dead but is alive. When I got this idea, and realized that Doctor Angstrum, when I awakened, was simply under *caapi* influence, I tried it on myself again.

"In the office behind this one, where I have all the instruments I need, thermometers and the like, I had Betty Kelly meet me to make observations while I was unconscious. Poor kid, it must have been a trial to her, for when I stopped breathing—as she told me just before this meeting—she almost yelled for the police."

I TOOK a look at a picture of me Betty had taken while I was completely under the influence. I made a handsome "corpse," I thought. I passed the picture around.

"All very interesting," said Angstrum, while Hellman looked at his watch impatiently, "but what has it to do with me? Is there any law against imbibing *caapi* to excess?"

"No, but here is something curious. What kind of person would go on such a jag while a man he had beaten senseless was lying on the floor beside his bed? A man sure to waken and perhaps kill him while he was unconscious? A man—well, just who would do it?"

"I would. I did," said Angstrum. "After all, you broke and entered. In the eyes of the law you were a burglar. My bedroom was my castle."

"And you didn't expect me ever to regain consciousness, Angstrum. That's true, isn't it?"

"Since you *aren't* dead," said Angstrum quietly, "yes, it's true."

I turned to Detective Lieutenant Zeb Minas. "Here, for your consideration, is a man who admits himself capable of murder, as well as of lying down and sleeping soundly near the body of his victim," I said. "Such evidence won't stand up in a court of law, but I'm collecting evidence that will."

Minas rose, sighed.

"Just don't leave town in a hurry, Doctor Angstrum," he said. "And bear this in mind: Pinero, Armitage and Hellman will have close protection hereafter. You may all go."

When they had departed, Minas turned to me.

"Just how do you expect to get any such evidence?" he asked. "The whole

(Continued on page 83)

The Color of Murder

By Carl Memling

Tom Daniels bought a gay-colored suit for a festival—but it turned out to be more appropriate for a funeral.

HE WALKED slowly toward town, a nondescript farmer with face and clothes equally grey and wrinkled; and for the first time in years, the evening air smelled sweet in his nostrils.

Following the curving shoulder of the road, he made the last slow S-turn; and then, just ahead, he saw the lights of the town. His shoulders straightened and he walked faster. The lights began taking shape. He could distinguish the round blurs of the street lamps from the bright rectangles of the store windows now.

He broke into a half trot. The lights bobbed closer. His flailing feet kept spanking dust up from the road.

He reached Main Street, and he was like a boy at the circus. His eyes darted everywhere. He stopped to gape at every store window. Passers-by saw him and wrinkled their brows in wonderment.

"Hi, Daniels," someone said, and his response was muted and shy, as though he'd just come from a place where folks never greeted each other friendlylike.

Then he saw it, and gasping, he knew at last why he had been drawn to town that night.

It was a suit in the window of Sam Marlow's store. Only a suit, but the bright checks and the gay plaid set his heart dancing. Slowly, shuffling, like a boy sidling toward a cookie jar he knows he shouldn't touch, he drew closer and closer, till at last his gnarled hands were pressed against the glass.

His eyes misted and instead of the store window he saw a barn dance session with the fiddle squeaking and the girls laughing, their upflung necks powder-white . . . while the men drank from jugs in the shadowy yard outside and exchanged neighborly talk. And flitting everywhere, like a scarecrow given life, through all the magic pictures — *the checked suit in the window!*

How long he would have stayed there, dreaming, if Old Sam Marlow hadn't stepped out of the store, nobody can tell.

OLD SAM had opened shop in town when there were only fourteen houses plus the post office. But as the town grew, the range of Old Sam's goods narrowed. He specialized in men's suits now. Men's suits and town history. Anyone wanted to know any goings-on in Lemonville, they just asked Sam Marlow.

"Well, well," Old Sam said, "If it ain't Tom Daniels. Drunk—?" Old Sam's eyes suddenly narrowed. A moment passed, then he asked softly, "How're you, my friend?"

Regretfully, Tom Daniels turned from the vibrant-colored suit in the window. "Thank you," he said. "Right well, Mr. Marlow."

Old Sam scratched his bald shining head. "And the missus?" he asked.

"Kate—Kate's taken to bed."

Old Sam frowned. "She doing poorly? I hadn't heard no talk about it."

"No, Mr. Marlow—just resting. Said she could use a rest. There's not too much work for one man on the farm. Just the chores, now the crops are in. So she up and crawled into bed."

Old Sam nodded slowly, then his face creased into a frown. "You're not planning to buy anything?" he said, his voice faintly burred with worry.

Tom Daniels looked back at the suit. The checks danced before his eyes; he had never seen such lapels before. His fists clenched slowly. He was wearing black, greyed by dust, and his elbows and his knees were patched with black.

"How much is that suit?" he asked suddenly.

Old Sam sighed resignedly. When he spoke, he spoke very slowly. "Thirty—dollars."

Tom Daniels took a deep breath. "Got my size?" he asked.

"Guess I have," Old Sam said. Then Old Sam shook his head worriedly. "Maybe you want some time to think this over, Tom?"

The jaws tightened on Tom Daniels' face. "If you got my size," he said deliberately, "I'm going in to buy it." Then he smiled a queer twisted smile. "Always wanted a suit with a spot of color," he said.

NOW it was two months later, and Tom Daniels was sitting in the sheriff's office. Outside, the wind was howling, but inside, sweat kept trickling down Tom Daniels' face.

The sheriff was an older man than Tom. He was tall and broad, and he had a round red face. You could see that he'd once liked Tom and he wasn't enjoying what he had to do.

"You shouldn't of, Tom . . ." he said.

Tom sighed and shrugged his shoulders. "She was mean," he said. "My Kate was a regular old she-devil. She kept me like they keep the boys on the road gangs. You couldn't see the chains, but they were there."

The sheriff bunched his lips together and shook his head.

"Must have always had the streak in her," Tom said, "but it came out proper and a yard wide after the baby died. That was twenty-three years ago. We had one baby, a boy, name of Robert—died of pneumonia at the age of eleven months, and she like to went out of her head, mourning over him.

"She blamed me. Said he'd caught a draft from a window I'd left open. Made me keep mourning always, all those years, twenty-three of them—tried not to let me break it for a second. Nothing but work. Never a day for fun. You remember how wild a young one I was—dressed spruce every Saturday night, dancing and drinking with the best of them. And here I was, always working and praying and wearing black clothes and feeling to blame."

Tom Daniels' face began to twitch and he beat the arm of his chair with his fist. "It was too much for a body to stand," he said hoarsely. "She used to beat me if she caught me drinking plain cider or even smoking. Sometimes I'd get more than my full from the jug and I'd run off to town. Just run down the road, yelling and laughing—I can't even remember what I'd do once I got there. I'd get back, and she'd be waiting for me with a bullwhip.

"All that time I never touched her, but inside, I kept boiling. Got so, at last, I guess I clear went crazy too.

"She came at me that night, screaming and waving a broom. I let her have it in the head with the jug I'd been drinking from.

"I'd hit her in a flash of anger

without setting my strength, and when I bent down to help her to her feet, I saw she was dead.

"I felt bad. I killed, but I'm not the killing sort. Kate'd been touched in the head, but before the baby, she'd had her sparks of fun and sweet-life, just like everybody else. The blood where I'd hit her was like a red bonnet—the first touch of color I'd seen on her in all those years.

"I thought that, and I like to cried. . . .

"Then I buried her out in the pasture. Between the elms where you dug her up. I said prayers over her and asked her forgiveness.

"Afterwards I thought up a story about how I'd make believe she'd gone visiting her kin in Chicago. I had it all reckoned out. The farm's a good distance from town. Visitors could come and go, using the state highway, and never come through the town itself. So I'd say Kate's sister came and took her visiting. And after time passed—three months or more—I'd say a letter came saying she'd died—and that her sister wanted to bury her in Chicago.

"That was my plan. And as time went by, I was sure it would work out right. I hadn't even said a word yet to anyone about the letter, when yesterday you came around—"

Tom Daniels was sobbing now, wiping his eyes on the sleeve of his jacket. The tears stained the vibrant-colored checked material in grey damp splotches. Suddenly he looked up with widening eyes.

"How'd you know to come around and do all that digging?" he asked.

"Old Sam Marlow," the sheriff said. "What he told me."

Tom Daniels frowned puzzledly. "Sam Marlow? How'd he come to know?"

The sheriff walked slowly to the door. He clicked it open an inch and called through the slit, "Mr. Marlow!"

Old Sam slipped into the office, his face white with cold and worry. He looked questioningly at the sheriff, then quickly averted his head, as though he wanted his unvoiced question to remain unanswered.

"Mr. Marlow," the sheriff said, "tell Tom Daniels what you told me."

OLD Sam looked sadly at Tom. "You bought the bright-colored suit when you were cold sober," he said. "And then Kate never brought it back."

Tom shook his head. "Bring it back? Kate?"

Old Sam's eyes met the sheriff's, then slid back to Tom's. "I always thought you didn't know what you were up to, Tom Daniels, when you came to my store three times in the past year, liquored up worse than any man I've ever seen. You walked in every time, cussing and mean, and you bought a suit. 'Any color but black,' you said."

"Me?" Tom asked dazedly.

"Yup." Old Sam's voice dropped to a slow hoarse whisper. "Then, every time, like clockwork, Kate brought the suit back the next day, cleaned and neat-pressed, and I gave her credit less wear-and-tear. And then I always knew you were back to wearing mourning again."

Tom moaned. "I never remembered afterwards. Just the whippings when I got home — that's all I remembered!"

"And this last time," Old Sam said again, "you were cold sober when you bought the suit, and poor Kate never carried it back."

Tom moaned and cradled his face in his hands.

"You see," the sheriff said softly, "you see why I started digging. . . ."

The Silken Noose

True Crime Feature

By Sam D. Cohen

The archives of the famed French Surete are filled with tales of brilliant sleuthing. But few can top this story of an unrelenting manhunt that covered two continents.

FATE has played a part in many crimes and appeared in many guises. But on August 14, 1889, it showed up in the strangest form that ever confronted the efficient French Surêté's man-hunting machine, namely, that of a straying pig. This shoat brought to light a fiendish murder.

The significant porker had wandered away from its sty, and its agitated owner, searching through the brush for it several miles away, came upon a half-covered hole in which lay the body of a man. The corpse, which was badly decomposed, rested in a sack that had been dropped in a tangle of brambles near the town of

Millery, ten miles from Lyons.

The figure, stripped of clothing, was doubled up and kept in a stooping position by a stout cord; the head was carefully wrapped in a special piece of black wax cloth.

Terrified by the ugly scene, the farmer fled, shouting for the authorities, all thoughts of his lost shoat disappearing from his mind.

After a short space of time the police appeared and began its investigation. Seaching the clothes of the victim brought to light no papers or other marks of identification. The face was not recognized; the fingers of both hands were so shriveled there was no hope of obtaining fingerprints from them.

The following day came another discovery—a huge trunk hidden in a clump of bushes some miles from where the body had been found. The trunk carried two labels which read, *Gare de depart. Paris 1231* and *Paris 27 Juillet — 188. TR3. Destination Lyons-Perrache.*

Detectives fine-combed the area with a minuteness that was uncanny, and by a great stroke of luck found a key which fitted the lock of the trunk. In Paris, at Surêté headquarters, Monsieur Marie-Francois Goron, a famed sleuth, deduced that the body had originally been forced in the trunk, which apparently had been shipped from Paris to Lyons on July 27, 1889—even though the final "9" on the label had been omitted.

Goron set the well-oiled machine of the famous Surêté in motion to track down the murderer. He had descriptions of both corpse and trunk sent to every corner of France. The newspapers co-operated by publishing pictures of the trunk—which was unusually large in size.

And then, Goron, being well-versed in the latest method of crime detection, brought into play the latest ideas of modern science, something his dyed-in-the-wool contemporaries refused to believe.

THE first thing Goron noticed was the victim's hair. Taking a pair of scissors from his pocket, he snipped several hairs from the head of the corpse while perplexed looks appeared on the faces of his colleagues. But Goron made no explanation. He simply placed the hairs in an envelope and hastened back to Paris and the crime laboratory.

Here he and Dr. Alexandre Lacassagne, the great criminal pathologist, spent some time diligently studying the hair of the corpse under the all-seeing eyes of a powerful microscope. Leaving Dr. Lacassagne to complete the study of the hair, Monsieur Goron called for the records of all persons who had been reported missing during the past six months. This gave him a significant lead.

On July 26 the friends of Toussaint Augustus Gouffe, a bailiff with offices at 148 Rue Montmartre, Paris, reported him missing to the Paris police. And the unusually large trunk was shipped from Paris the following day, July 27.

On July 29, a brother-in-law of the missing Gouffe, together with an old friend, once more appealed to the Paris police to renew their efforts to locate the missing man.

They couldn't understand what had happened to Gouffe. They described him as fifty-nine years of age and in excellent health; that he had been a widower for many years and that he had lived with his two daughters on the Rue Rougemont. Gouffe was quite wealthy and had a way with the women.

He had last been seen alive on Friday, July 26. Friday was his customary night out—and by Friday he would be likely to have much money which he had collected as a bailiff in the course of the week. They said that he always secreted the money in his office, placing it in a cubbyhole behind a letter file. Gouffe was listed as having brown hair.

The hair snipped from the unidentified corpse was black and matted,

and Goron thought his lead might be wasted. He hastened back to the laboratory to consult once more with Dr. Lacassagne. Here the great pathologist had information.

After careful tests, Dr. Lacassagne reported that the hair of the corpse appeared black and long because it was glued together by blood. He had submerged wads of hair in distilled water, rid the hair of the blood, and thus was able to prove his finding.

The black hair disappeared. Instead, the hair was shown to be brown. Goron took over at the microscope. He examined the brown hair for several minutes. Then he announced in a powerful and positive tone:

"The murdered man was Gouffe!"

Goron then summoned the brother-in-law and the friend of the murdered man and went at once to Gouffe's office. Here the caretaker had an unusual story.

At nine thirty on the night Gouffe disappeared, said the caretaker, the house bell rang and he admitted a man who, by stature and dress, resembled Gouffe. The man went upstairs to the bailiff's office, remained about five minutes, then came down again.

"I approached him with Mr. Gouffe's mail, then saw to my surprise that it was not Mr. Gouffe," stated the caretaker. "I demanded to know who he was, but he said, 'It's quite all right. I am one of Mr. Gouffe's employees.' With that, he hurried away."

GORON went upstairs to investigate. Here he found Gouffe's collections untouched—a sum amounting to about sixteen hundred dollars was in the hiding place. The detective observed grease spots on the floor, apparently caused by candle droppings, as well as muddy footprints near the door. Aside from that, there was no disorder.

By questioning neighbors, Goron's detectives ascertained that Gouffe had left his office on that eventful Friday at 6:30 P.M., and he was seen at 7:10 sitting in a café on the Boulevard Montmatre—just as thousands of other Parisians were doing that evening. He was dressed in his best clothes, including a top hat.

No other trace of Gouffe was found after that.

Gouffe's brother-in-law went to Lyons to view the remains, but decomposition had been so thorough the relative could not be certain. Once more Goron turned to Dr. Lacassagne. The pathologist established beyond doubt first, that the body agreed with the description of the missing man, and also that death had been due to strangulation.

But the identity of the victim did not solve the crime—there was a murderer or murderers to be apprehended. This, and the motive, was still a mystery.

With the identification established, the next official matter was the tracing of the trunk. Meanwhile, the kin of Gouffe offered a reward of twelve hundred and fifty dollars leading to the arrest and conviction of the killer or killers.

Gouffe's apartment near his office was M. Goron's next visit. But this place, too, gave no lead to the killer.

Leaving Gouffe's lodging, Goron returned to the office. He scrutinized the place carefully. At length an object attracted his attention. Lying on the floor, near the strongbox where the murdered man had hidden his funds, lay a piece of silk cord which looked as if it had come from a tassel of a woman's sash. Goron breathed deeply, remembering that Gouffe had died of strangulation, and placed the cord in his pocket.

It was possible that the silk cord was the messenger of death!

This gave Goron the additional lead that the murderer was a man. A woman usually stabbed, poisoned or shot a man when committing murder. She seldom strangled the victim, probably because the average woman lacked the physical strength for

strangulation. However, the silk cord came from a woman's garment; therefore, Goron reasoned, a man and a woman were implicated in the crime of murder.

THE first real break came on December 27, 1889. On this date a letter arrived at M. Goron's desk from a London boardinghouse keeper. This informant stated he had seen the picture of the trunk in a London newspaper, and believed it was the property of a man and a women who had lodged in his place.

This couple—their names were Michel Eyraud and Gabrielle Bompard—had purchased this unusually large piece of luggage in London. Because of its giant size it had attracted attention from all who had seen it. Miss Bompard had left for Paris on July 14, taking this trunk with her, and Eyraud followed her soon after.

Goron could not have hoped for better results. The pair had left for Paris two months before, and Gouffe had been missing about seven weeks at about the time his body was found. Chief Goron assigned Detective Jaume, a most capable officer, to investigate this phase of the case.

Jaume learned that Gabrielle Bompard had been living at 13 Rue Jouffray, and that she had left this address during the last week in July. The landlord at this address stated that he had not seen her since. However, he distinctly recalled the unusually large trunk.

As for Michel Eyraud, Detective Jaume learned that the man had married into a good family. Then one day he met Gabrielle and in a short while became so infatuated with her that he left his wife for her.

Chief Goron established, from friends of the murdered man, that the victim had known Gabrielle and Eyraud. But as yet no facts, beside the trunk, could be produced that would tie the pair to the disappearance and the murder. Search as they might, the efficient Surêté could not locate Bompard and Eyraud in France.

Months passed. Then, on New Year's Day, 1890, M. Goron received a letter with a New York postmark and signed, "Michel Eyraud."

Eyraud stated he wished to take Goron in his confidence and confess an "atrocious crime" which had been committed by that "wicked woman," Gabrielle Bompard. It was she, he wrote, who had planned the murder and had forced him to assist her. The man added that, through "unfortunate circumstances" over which he had no control, he had been connected with the crime and would surrender as soon as the girl gave herself up.

He added that they had fled to the United States after the crime, and that the girl had deserted him in New York for another man.

M. Goron was most delighted on receiving this letter from Eyraud. The man appeared most jealous, and possibly the old adage of when "thieves fall out" might bring the murderers of Gouffe to the guillotine.

Goron did not give Eyraud an opportunity to change his mind and disappear once more for parts unknown. True, Eyraud did not enclose his address in the letter, but the postmark from New York was something to work on. The chief of the Paris Sêreté notified the New York City police by cable, then dispatched Jaume and another detective on the hunt for the murderer.

GORON now turned his attention to the trunk that was so helpful. Though he was now sure of the identity of the killers, he needed as much evidence as possible to obtain a court conviction. Parts of the trunk were sent to England to be shown to trunk manufacturers. It was an easy job to find who had made it—so few of that size were marketed.

The manufacturer was located. It took no time then to find the dealer who actually made the sale. A visit was made immediately to the dealer—

who owned a luggage store. The luggage store had a record of all sales of the type trunk used in the murder. One purchaser—a Michael Eyeling of Gower Street, in the West End—had made some other purchases in the hardware department when he bought the trunk in the middle of July, two weeks before Gouffe had dropped out of sight.

Eyeling had also purchased a pulley, a length of rope, and a snap hook such as is used on the end of a dog's leach to fasten it to the collar.

Goron knew all he need know. The method of the crime was already in his mind. Eyeling—or Eyraud—was his man. A pulley, rope, and a snap hook could have been used to hang a man around whose neck a slim sash had first been knotted.

But Goron was not finished with his investigation. He now visited the various express agencies in London, the photograph of the trunk in his hand. This was to determine how the trunk was convoyed from England to Paris, to the home where the crime was committed. Once more the size of the trunk was a great assistance to him. More information was gathered.

The trunk had crossed the English Channel the last week in July. Goron re-crossed the Channel, still on the trail. At length the detective stood before a house on the Rue Tronson-Decoudray. There, according to the records of an express company, the trunk was delivered to a Mme. Michael Eyeling. The caretaker of this house—a boarding house—was cooperative. The description of Mme. Michal Eyeling fitted Gabrielle Bompard.

The girl no longer lived at this address. She disappeared, leaving no forwarding address, her rent in arrears, on July 30, the day following the disappearance of Gouffe.

The detective requested permission to see the room of the girl, still unoccupied. The room was in disorder, clothing strewn about. But to Goron the room was most interesting. The bathtub, too, had not been cleaned since the girl had left, the tub was stained—crimson stains. Goron nodded to himself.

More damaging evidence was found. In a corner of the room stood the bed. Behind the bed were hung heavy draperies. Behind the draperies a stout board had been nailed into the wall above head level and it bore marks that showed where a pulley had been attached.

The detective reconstructed the crime. Gouffe had visited Gabrielle. The girl received him dressed in a silken red kimono. The apartment consisted of a living room with an alcove, where stood the fatal bed. The girl led Gouffe to the bed and there they both sat and talked.

Gabrielle released the black silk sash that she wore around the kimono and playfully fashioned it into a noose which she put around his neck.

Behind the draperies Eyraud waited. The girl gave him a signal, the man seized the end of the sash, attached it to the pulley rope with the snap hook and jerked the helpless Gouffe to a hanging position.

Within a few minutes Gouffe was dead.

They released their dead victim and Eyraud unconsciously put the sash in his pocket. They went through the clothes of Gouffe, found only one hundred and fifty francs and some keys. Eyraud took the keys and went to the home of the victim and vainly searched for the money that he knew must be there. The search was fruitless to him, as far as money was concerned, but it turned out to be deadly.

While searching, he unconsciously dropped the silken cord.

IN THE meantime Detective Jaume was not idle. The French Surêté has a well-earned reputation for getting their man. Upon his arrival in the United States Jaume began tracing the couple in New York City. Eyraud, when he searched Gouffe's

apartment, had stolen some jewelry trinkets; in New York then Jaume's first objective were the pawnshops. Here he was successful. He came across a ring which he immediately identified through Goron's description as belonging to the slain man.

It had been pawned by a young woman—Gabrielle, according to the description given the detective by the pawnbroker. The address she had given was that of a hotel on the Bowery.

Jaume went to the hotel. The clerks on duty knew the girl—she and Eyraud had stayed there but had checked out a short time before. They were always arguing and the management had complained, requesting that they move.

Their new address was not known, but the clerk had seen Eyraud a few times on Fourteenth Street, looking in shop windows, which seemed to be a habit of his.

Jaume wired this information to Goron, who telegraphed instructions. The Surêté is famous not only for its persistence but for its deep knowledge of psychology. Now it came into play.

Miniature guillotines were manufactured and placed in several store windows. Jaume, together with the assistance of the New York City police, watched and waited.

A day or so later, walking arm and arm, window-shopping, came Gabrielle and Eyraud. At length they came to a window that contained the miniature guillotine. The pair looked at it, wide-eyed, then hastened away. They went to a hotel; Eyraud walked to the desk while Gabrielle took the elevator. The watching officers saw the man checking out.

A few minutes later Gabrielle appeared, carrying their luggage.

From New York the couple went to Chicago, Nebraska, Utah, San Francisco, thence to Canada. Every place they went they were followed by the relentless Jaume. And every place they stopped, they had barely unpacked when they saw the miniature guillotines. In store windows, upon the bars of saloons, upon hotel desks—there was always a guillotine.

This unnerving experience began to tell on the pair. It took no clairvoyant to tell why they remained together despite their numerous arguments and the frequent use that Eyraud made of his fists. Together they were safe from informing on the other.

The climax was reached when Eyraud found Gabrielle with another man. That night he gave her an unmerciful beating. Early the next morning he left the hotel, alone, never to return. Jaume watching, smiled. The piece of the plan were fitting together.

EYRAUD'S next move was to Mexico City. By this time the man became a consistent heavy drinker, and his face was drawn from lack of sleep. He checked into a hotel and went upstairs to rest. When he came down from his room and was crossing the lobby, the clerk called to him. Someone had left a message for him, and he was handed an envelope.

Eyraud opened the envelope and a cry escaped his lips. The envelope and its contents fell to the floor.

In the envelope was the photograph of a black silk sash!

By this time Gabrielle was on her way back to France, a member of the Surêté close at hand. Her first stop on French soil was at Surêté headquarters, where Goron waited.

Hysterically the girl told the story. At Eyraud's insistence she had lured Gouffe to her apartment and to his death.

The motive was robbery. They had first intended taking only the money in the victim's posession, but when Eyraud found Gouffe's keys he remembered the rumors he had heard of the considerable amount of money supposed to be secreted in the latter's office. He decided then to do a more thorough job. But he had been frightened away by the caretaker before he

could find the funds. This accounted for the unopened strongbox.

Back in Mexico City, Eyraud found there was no rest for the weary—or wicked. The relentless Jaume still remained on his trail. At length the murderer made the move planned for him by Goron sometime before. He took a boat back to France.

As soon as he landed on French soil he was placed under arrest. In the condition he was in, he was no match for the clever interrogators that questioned him. The entire story piled out from his lips and he pleaded for only a chance to rest.

Eyraud and Gabrielle went on trial in Paris on December 16, 1890. The man got the guillotine—this time the actual one, not a miniature. Gabrielle's plea that she was under the "hynotic spell" of Eyraud—got her twenty years from the gallant court.

Before being condemned to death, Eyraud made a little speech that he was unafraid to die, but that Gabrielle should die also.

He was guillotined in Paris on February 3, 1891.

Gabrielle served her time and was released. She died in 1926.

Thus again the famed French Surêté—by its efficiency, persistence, and daring imagination — followed minute clues over two continents, but did not relent till it had caught its quarry.

Tentacles of Caapi

By Arthur J. Burks

(Continued from page 73)

thing sounds like one of those *caapi* pipe dreams!"

I grinned at him, knowing he wouldn't believe what I next told him.

"The *caapi* I got off Angstrum," I said, "was the straight gooda. While under its influence I did some telepathic, or clairvoyant, or *caapi*-like work on Angstrum. I 'saw' how he had done it, who helped him, willingly or otherwise. All I have to do is assemble it."

That was the exact truth, and Minas didn't believe it. So I never mentioned it again, not even when, following the "visions" given me by *caapi* jags, I assembled the evidence which sent Doctor Angstrum to the electric chair for the murder of Joel Ney. If that charge hadn't stuck, on the evidence provided, he'd have been tried for the murder either of Leighty or Chance.

Caapi, I realized, could be amazingly useful to a private eye. But because, with each successive "jag," it "sneaked up on you" more insidiously than before, I cut it completely when the supply I got from Angstrum's bedroom ran out.

Footsteps over Water

By Ray Cummings

When Patton gunned down his old crony in crime, he did not realize that even the thinnest of evidence can bind a man tightly to the chair.

IN THE night silence of the dark little cove, the shot sounded startlingly loud. Muir's body pitched forward, his fishing rod dropping from his hands as he crumpled and lay half submerged—a sodden blob in the shadows of the shorefront. Close by, Jim Patton, tensely holding the revolver, felt his heart pounding madly. He hadn't meant to kill Muir. Certainly not now. Blackmail is too good a racket.

There were other little cabins, besides Muir's, dotted around here in the woods behind the cove. It was a summer fishing colony. People would have heard the shot. Big Jim Patton flung his revolver out into the waters of the cove and leaped into his canoe.

The body of Muir was a blob beside it. For a second as he shoved off with his paddle, Patton stared down at the gruesome blur of white face with the water lapping over it. Then his small canvas canoe was gliding silently along the shadowed cove shore, heading for the tree-lined opening beyond which the inlet was a blur of open darkness.

Patton thanked his stars for the darkness of the cloudy, sullen night. With skillful silent strokes of his single paddle he urged his frail craft forward. No one could see him from the woods back of the cove. He was sure of it.

But now he could hear voices back there. People were shouting startled questions; and then there was the sound of them running down toward the cove.

The little opening into the inlet was barely thirty feet wide. It was solid with shadows from the overhanging tree branches so that the tiny blob of Patton's canoe couldn't have been seen as it darted through. The inlet itself, with its distant opening to the gulf, was a broad expanse of dark mist.

For a moment Patton was tense, fearing that some other craft might be out here. But there were none.

THE tiny wooded islet, which had just the single cabin that Patton had rented a few days ago, was off to the left a few hundred feet from the cove-mouth. He headed for it, beached his canoe and darted up the little path under the trees.

Sounds carry clearly over the water at night. Behind him, through the mist, he could hear the voices of men down in the cove now. Undoubtedly they were finding the body of Ronald Muir lying there.

He could picture the scene. The horrified men. Some of them were wealthy business men, roughing it here for the summer. They would know Muir. He was one of their own kind. Ironic thought that Ronnie

Muir, high-class confidence man ten years ago, was a respected business man now! His shocked friends would phone for the sheriff. They'd done that already, very probably.

Patton's little board cabin with its two small rooms was dark under the cluster of trees in the center of the islet. Patton darted into it. Within a minute he was undressed and in bed, lying tense.

But what danger could there be? The sheriff and his men would question people. Then they'd probably notify the police over at Centerville. The murder of Ronald Muir would cause quite a commotion here in this quiet little section. But of everyone here, Patton could be least suspected. He alone had no connection whatever with this murder. He didn't even know Ronald Muir. Had never heard of him, never laid eyes on him. That's what everyone would think!

It was ten years now since Muir and Patton had been partners in the con game racket. Muir, as Patton saw it, had been a dirty double-crosser. He hadn't taken the rap with Patton. Eight years in the pen can build a mighty hatred for your enemy. Patton had come out, nursing it, searching for Muir.

And the hatred had grown when he had located Muir here. Muir, going straight all that time, had done well by himself with a small manufacturing business. He was in the money now. It had given Patton a new idea. Muir wouldn't want the past raked up.

And so tonight, just a few minutes ago, Patton had left his islet, paddled to the cove with the intention of sneaking up to Muir's cabin and confronting him. A little quiet blackmail, conducted here through the summer, would be very profitable. But Muir had resisted it. Little fool, he had even threatened to have Patton arrested for trying it.

Now Muir was dead. In a burst of hatred and fury Patton had shot him. . . .

Lying tense in the little cabin bed, Patton could feel his heart pounding. The shouts over at the cove were blurred but still faintly audible. And suddenly he was aware of a soft rhythmic *thump-thump*.

He listened, straining. *Thump—thump—thump—thump*. Almost like his heart, and not much louder. Then a shuddering thrill darted through him. It was the sound of oars in oarlocks. A rowboat. And as he listened, it seemed to grow a little louder. And faster.

Thump-thump . . . Thump-thump. . . .

It sounded like a rowboat coming out of the cove. And now there was the faint distant murmur of men's voices.

PATTON put on dressing gown and slippers. At his cabin door he could hear it still plainer. But the trees hid the inlet. Patton went down the path. In a thicket by the shore of his tiny islet he crouched, peering into the mist.

Thump-thump. . . . The rowboat was a tiny blob; but in a moment Patton could make out that it was heading toward him. A rowboat with what looked like two or three men, coming here to his cabin.

The rush of his startled fear turned Patton cold for an instant and blurred all his thoughts. Then he steadied himself. They were coming to question him, just as they would question everyone around here. But that was peculiar, because certainly the sheriff hadn't arrived yet. Why would the men from the cove come here so quickly?

"Still got it?"

"Yeah. Keep going."

The snatches of voices from the rowboat abruptly were wafted clearly to him. . . . Still got it? Got what?

Steadily the rowboat came. Now Patton could see that it was heading almost toward where he was crouching. Vaguely he had planned a moment ago to dart back to his cabin

and let them come and supposedly wake him up if they wanted to talk to him. But now they might see him on the path.

Patton, in his dressing gown over his pajamas, stood up beside a little tree trunk. He called, "Hey, you! What is it? Thought I heard a shot a while ago."

The rowboat was only about a hundred feet away now. Patton could see it had three men in it. One was in the bow, hunched down at the gunwale; one was rowing; the other was in the stern. The man in the stern stood up.

"A shot? You damn sure did! Ronald Muir's been murdered!"

Thump-thump . . . thump-thump. Still the man in the center of the little rowboat kept his steady rhythmic stroke. He murmured something, and the man in the bow said, "Yeah! Still got it!"

"Murdered?" Patton gasped. "Somebody shot? Muir . . ." And then he added, "Don't know him! I'm new here. Have you a phone over there? Did you phone the sheriff?"

"Yes. He's coming! We're just trying to see what the devil this—" The man in the stern suddenly checked himself at a muttered exclamation from his companion.

Then the rowboat landed. Patton was about ten feet away. He started forward, but one of them said sharply, "Take it easy. Stay there a minute."

They were whispering together. One of them said, "Well, I'll be damned—that cinches it. Can you beat it?"

THEY whispered again. They were big fellows; two of them young, one middle-aged. They whispered; then there was a fragment of sound. ". . . Play it safe . . ."

"What—what's the idea?" Patton said. Again he moved toward them. One of the younger men said,

"Well, it was peculiar. We'll show you . . ."

He came and touched Patton's arm. Playing it safe. . . . In the dimness Patton saw that the big youth was smiling, but in the same instant he suddenly had flung his arms around Patton, clutching for Patton's wrists.

"Got him!" he said. "See if he's got the gun on him!"

"You—you— What the devil—" Patton's head was whirling. They were all three gripping him now, holding him, searching the pockets of his dressing gown. "Gun? Gun?" Patton gasped. He stood tense, resisting them but not trying to fight. "What you mean, gun? Of course I haven't any."

They were convinced of it. Their grip loosened. They stood grim. The older man said, "Guess we better row back with him. Or wait here and call to the sheriff. He—"

"What the devil you talking about?" Patton protested.

"About the killer," the big youth rasped. "Let's hear *you* tell it! You heard the shot, didn't you?"

"Sure I did! I guess so. I was asleep in bed—guess it woke me up." The shaking Patton gestured vaguely. "I live in the little cabin here, just rented it a few days ago."

"Asleep in bed?" one of the other men said. "Or did you just arrive here in your canoe?"

"Asleep," Patton reiterated.

"Your paddles are wet."

"Wet? Oh, well, maybe they are. Why not? I—" Patton fought not to stammer. "I was out in it, paddled across the inlet and back, came home, went to bed. Look here, I don't like your tone. I—"

"Show him," the older man said. And now they were shoving him to his canoe. "Take a look at the stern there. You face forward when you paddle, or you might have seen it."

Numbly the horrified Jim Patton stared at the stern of his little canoe and his mind swept back . . . how Muir's fishing rod fell with him

(Continued on page 96)

Deadline at Seven

Seven A.M. was the deadline for Bogart Danford, fugitive — to bring in his wife's killer, or to deliver himself for a cemetery setup.

By Donn Mullally

BOGART DANFORD, fugitive. He felt strange in that role—miscast. And frightened, as he'd seen other men frightened.

There was this difference: the average man in trouble is mercifully ignorant of law. The law was Danford's life. He had no illusions about

justice and right triumphant.

So Bogart Danford toiled up San Francisco's Telegraph Hill, his breath hot and sulphurous in his dry mouth.

This being hunted was not for forty-nine-year-old barristers who train on Martinis. He wasn't the athletic type; about five-six, with a low center of gravity acquired on office chairs. His hair thin, brown; his eyes brown, melancholy; his mouth inclined to twist sardonically. Danford's broad shoulders came with the dark, double-breasted suit he was wearing.

As he worked higher, he felt more secure. The hill made a satisfactory refuge this late at night, traffic a distant growl on Columbus and Broadway. He was a stranger in town, his home town. The bug-eyed apartment houses crowding the sidewalk were an old, old story told with a new twist. The whole sloping neighborhood felt strange to him.

At last he could see his destination; perhaps only a way-point in a slightly longer journey—across the Bay to San Quentin. The gas chamber.

To Danford the light in the building entranceway looked as bright as a police line-up. The street was deserted but he pulled his hat lower; he realized he was acting like a heavy character in a cheap melodrama. That didn't help — the realization. He pressed O'Rorke's buzzer hard, held his breath until the electric lock clattered.

O'RORKE met him at the door of his apartment, eyes sleepy, resentful. Then he recognized Danford, gasped, "Bogey! Come in here."

Lieutenant Clarence O'Rorke looked like a cop, even in a baggy, terry-cloth robe. He was a big man, thick, with a pelt of red, curly hair.

"You alone?" Danford asked.

O'Rorke bobbed his head, still openly fighting the idea he ought to do something official about Danford. Then he smiled.

"For cripe's sake, sit down before you fall down."

Danford shuffled to a brown leather chair by the windows. The air hissed out of the cushion under him. He mopped his face and hands with a crumpled handkerchief, tossed his hat on the woolly rug. His pants stuck to his hot thighs.

"I'll fix a drink," O'Rorke offered, heading for the kitchen.

Danford leaned against the cool leather, said to his host's broad back, "I can use one."

He closed his eyes.

He opened them again when O'Rorke pressed a sweating glass into his hand. He put his thanks in a smile, had a go at the drink. The glass left a damp spot on the high bridge of his nose. He rubbed it dry.

"Do you think I killed Blanche, Red?" It was a simple, unemotional question, and Danford thought he sounded flat, like the playback of a wire recording.

"You want me to level, don't you, Bogey?"

"Certainly."

"Then I've got to say it—I do. Not that I—"

"Would you believe me if I said I didn't?" Danford cut in.

The detective's eyes narrowed. He wheeled and threw himself on the davenport.

"I'd like to, Bogey," he replied.

"But you can't. Is that it?"

O'Rorke's head moved affirmatively.

Bogey wiped his face again. His hands trembled. "That doesn't give me much of a break, does it?"

Red looked embarrassed. He took a package of cigarettes from his robe pocket. "Look, Bogey," he said unhappily, "we're been friends a long time—"

"Please, Red—no hearts and flowers," Danford interrupted. "Either you're for me or against me."

"I'd like to go along with you, Pappy. You know that. But how can I? Blanche—" he slurred her name, hunching his shoulders— "a poisonous dame, if you ever married one.

Nobody I've talked to understands why you didn't throttle her long ago."

He got off the davenport and held a match for Bogey. "I saw the D.A. today," he added. "He told me he'll settle for manslaughter."

Danford left his chair, stood looking out the big picture window—lights on the Embarcadero below him, the Bay Bridge and the East Bay, streaks of colored light shimmering on the water; another, very distant world. He turned back to O'Rorke.

"It's no good, Red. I can't cop a plea. There's a minor principle involved. I'm innocent."

O'Rorke started to break in, but Danford shook his head, went on: "Try to understand, Red. I'm fighting for my life. Even a year in jail, a month, would finish me as an attorney. It's one thing to sympathize with a convicted wife-killer — the poor devil might have been driven to it, and all that. But nobody wants to do business with him, or even shake liardice for a drink check."

Red O'Rorke had returned to the sofa, his feet on the cushions. He twisted and flicked ashes in the tray on the end table.

"Okay," he said, "suppose I'm on your side. What are we up against? You had dinner with her last night, didn't you?"

Bogey nodded.

"Her maid told us that," the detective explained. "She said Mrs. Danford gave her the night off. I don't imagine you'd mind telling me why."

Danford frowned. "I had a chance to sell the Sea Cliff house," he replied. "Under the community property law, she had to sign the deed. The dinner was her idea."

O'Rorke watched him closely, suggested, "So after dinner you went back to the house to talk it over?"

"Yes," Danford admitted. "Also her idea. We discussed the sale. She was on the fence — didn't know whether to sell or not—but asked me to leave the papers."

He saw O'Rorke's head move from side to side. "No, Bogey, I'm sorry," the detective said. "We found the deed where Blanche threw it after she'd torn it up—in the waste basket."

"That means I murdered her?"

"I'd rather cut my arm off to here than say yes," Red answered, "but there's no out for me. It indicates a row, Bogey. And with what I already know about the deal she'd given you, some might think it's a motive for strangling her."

DANFORD stared at Red for a moment. Could this possibly make any kind of sense? Would a jury buy it? The D.A. could show he had a motive, the opportunity, and an incident to trigger off all his repressed anger. He turned, scooped his hat from the floor.

"Thanks," he choked the words out. "Thanks for letting me see where I stand."

The detective untangled his long legs and stood up. He was between Danford and the door. "Where d'you think you're going?"

"I have work to do, Red."

"Huh-uh. I'm your pal, but I'm still a cop."

Danford smoothed the brim of his hat. "So what? I'm not running out. I'll meet you at my office at seven tomorrow morning. If I haven't turned up anything, you can have me."

The police officer in O'Rorke was miserable. "All right," he agreed haltingly. "I'm crazy, but go ahead. Only Bogey, listen, if you contact some other cop, don't make a break for it. I'd hate to have you shot over a bum rap like this."

Danford took Red's broad hand, twisted the corners of his mouth into the best job he could do of a smile. "The feeling's mutual. I'll be careful."

They went to the door.

"Hey, wait a minute." O'Rorke had an idea. He padded to the kitchen, returned with a pint of bourbon.

"How's for a little inspiration, Bogey?" Danford nodded.

Clear of O'Rorke's apartment, Bogey Danford slowed to a walk. He and an alley cat monopolized the quiet street. San Francisco was a big city. Bogey was sharply aware of that as its lights spread out before him, blinking question marks.

At Broadway, Danford flagged a cab to the curb. He crawled in the back end, told the driver, "Take me to Sea Cliff."

They were under way before the driver asked for the address. Danford hedged, said he'd tell him where to stop when they got there. Then he had a pull at the bottle Red had given him. He felt better, began to organize his thinking. . . .

Blanche had come to work for him as a secretary—just a girl answering a newspaper ad for a job. Frankly, if there hadn't been a wartime shortage of stenographers, she wouldn't have got the job. Not that he was any more allergic to a beautiful woman than the next Montgomery Street character. But Blanche was distractingly beautiful. She had an amazing head of blonde hair and an even more amazing figure.

With all these strikes on her, she'd turned out to be a competent enough secretary. Of course, Bogey had been on the receiving end of a lot of ribbing, which he had answered this way:

"What the hell do you expect me to do, discriminate against the girl simply because she's beautiful?"

He'd never known exactly how it happened—how he'd ever let his ego run away with his good judgment. Perhaps the constant din of shopworn gags about his relationship with Blanche drove him to it. Perhaps he was desperate. But he'd asked her to marry him; and there was no more surprised guy in town when he heard himself repeating the vows with her.

They were married by a judge friend of his, and honeymooned at Tahoe. There, in a small cabin by the lake, he felt the first gnawing doubts—wondered if he had taken a wife or a business partner.

WHEN they returned, Blanche had insisted on continuing at the office. Now she was Mrs. Big, an unimpeachable authority in all matters. He'd built the Sea Cliff house, hoping it would keep her occupied. But her interest in homemaking had lasted only as long as it took her to learn she was no society matron. She bounced right back. There was no escape. He had to tell her she was wrecking the organization.

Blanche had reacted with a declaration of war, personal, vicious. She alienated his friends, gossiped about his clients and associates, filled his nights with carping. He finally moved to his club, asked her to get a divorce—name her own settlement. Until then, he'd considered their marriage simply an unfortunate bargain. Blanche made it clear that it was a noose.

"Danford," she had told him, "no one brushes me off. When I'm through with you, a sewer will look like a cathedral!"

That was over two years ago. He'd watched his practice dwindle, partners leave. His friends sympathized with him, and avoided him. It was no surprise to find Red O'Rorke believed he had murdered her. He wasn't certain he did not feel cheated.

He had been strapped financially when this offer for the Sea Cliff place dropped out of the blue. A sixty-thousand-dollar reprieve. The deed was drawn before he called her.

O'Rorke's reconstruction of the previous evening had been correct, up to a point. He had taken Blanche to dinner, then home. He'd made a blunt, little speech.

"It's either sell, or money is going to be very thin indeed for some time, Blanche."

The lady was overly fond of spending money, so his ultimatum had shaken her. She'd promised to think it over. If he would leave the deed,

she'd call him in the morning. They had said good night at the door. So far as Bogey knew, she was alone in the house when he left. . . .

The cab driver cut in on him. "Here's Sea Cliff," he said. "Where did you want to go?"

Danford replied: "Just around the corner will be fine."

He was still five blocks from the house, most of them uphill. Out here on the south shore of the Golden Gate, it was easily ten degrees cooler than in town. Fog rode a sharp wind in from the Farallone Islands, felt refreshing against his face, smelled of ocean. Foghorns were roaring and bawling, echoed loud around this mansion-studded rock. Occasionally, he thought, he could hear surf breaking on China Beach.

He approached the big Mediterranean-type house on Camino del Rey warily. The street and cavernous driveway leading to the basement garage were clear of police cars. The windows were dark. This white stucco with its bobbed eaves and red tile roof looked familiar; yet, chilled, shivering Bogey Danford wondered if he was the same man who'd once lived there.

Dear Blanche had changed the locks on the doors when he moved out, so he thrashed about in the damp shrubbery testing windows. One in the solarium was unlatched. He eased it open and boosted himself to the sill, was straining to get a leg up when someone grabbed his shoulders and hauled him the rest of the way.

A rough voice boomed: "Let me give ya a hand, chum."

DANFORD made a vague swing in the direction of the sound, but was off balance; he fell to his knees on the tile floor. Before he could rise, the lights were on and he found himself looking at O'Rorke's number one boy, Sergeant Palimelio.

"The lootenant called and said I should expect you, Mr. Danford," he grinned, splitting his dark, round face with a display of non-ferrous metal.

"Considerate of him," snapped Danford, brushing himself. "Okay, if that's how he wants it."

He held his hands out, clenched. The sergeant winked one of his liver-colored eyes gravely, pointed at Bogey's right hand.

"I'll take that one."

Danford flushed. "Spare me the jokes. Make your arrest!"

Sergeant Palimelio shook his large head. "Who said anything about arresting you, Mr. Danford?" he asked. "O'Rorke just told me to be on the lookout for you and help any way I could."

Slowly Danford's hands fell to his sides. He tried to smile, but it came off a nervous twitch.

"All right," he said, "suppose you start by showing me where they found the body?"

Palimelio's grin went flat. "Sure, Mr. Danford. But ain't it—I mean—don't you know?"

They went to the den where Danford viewed a chalk mark outline that he thought rather unflattering to Blanche's figure. By about forty pounds. There was nothing else of interest in the room, so they started on the rest of the house. They turned back rugs, lifted chair cushions, peered down drains, took pictures off the wall, emptied bookcases and closets, looked under mattresses and through every dresser and bureau in the house.

The sergeant puffed along with Danford, lending a hand. "Just between us kids," the detective asked finally, "what are we supposed to be looking for?"

Danford was on his knees, pawing through twenty or more pairs of shoes Blanche had in her closet. He looked up, shrugged.

"I wish I knew."

To Palimelio's deadpan reaction, he went on: "I realize this doesn't square with everybody's idea of who killed Mrs. Danford, but I'm trying to prove I didn't. That means I have to find

something indicating another person had a motive for strangling her and was here last night. To be honest, I haven't so much as a hunch what that would be."

Palimelio wasn't discouraged. He dogged Danford's trail until it took them back to the living room and nothing. Bogey stood in the center of the huge, two-storied room, hands on his sides.

"Well," he declared flatly, "that's it."

He put a cigarette in his mouth as Palimelio thumped heavy-footed down the three steps from the hall level.

"You through?" asked the sergeant.

Danford looked at the detective over the blazing tip of a match. "Am I through?" he echoed bitterly, snapping the match at the cold fireplace. "Friend, you'll never know how completely!"

The sergeant followed him to the front hall. "Where are you going now?" he asked.

"I have an appointment with your boss."

"Maybe I could drive you," Palimelio suggested.

"What about the house?"

The detective smiled again. "My relief's due any minute—if you can wait."

Danford checked his watch. It was only five o'clock. He had promised O'Rorke he'd return to his office by seven.

"Okay," he said, "I'll appreciate a ride downtown."

They drifted back to the living room. Danford still couldn't figure out how all this had come about.

YESTERDAY, he had driven up to the State capitol to appear before the Board of Equalization for a client. He was just registering at a hotel when his eye had caught a picture, spread across three columns of the afternoon paper. Bogart Danford was wanted by the police for the murder of his wife.

He had digested that incredible fact, managed to escape from the crowded lobby without being recognized. He'd left his car in the parking lot and beaten his way back to town on a wildcat bus. There had been the hope that he would be able to work some miracle that would clear him—a faint hope.

He should have known that Blanche lacked the grace to let go of him. Even dead, she had him by the throat. He'd never escape.

"When I'm through with you, a sewer will look like a cathedral."

She'd been so right!

Danford stepped from this emotional bath with soap in his eyes. The lighted room swam. He blew his nose, hoping to cover the need for wiping his eyes. It annoyed him to have Palimelio ask:

"You ain't catchin' cold, Mr. Danford?"

He made a grimace meant for a smile.

The front-door chimes spared him the embarrassment of trying to speak.

Palimelio grunted to his feet. "Must be my relief," he rumbled, going to the door.

FOG rose off the lead-gray water, a brownish, smoky mass racing over the bridge, making orange stumps of the towers. Only the shore on the Marin side was visible as they left the house, the dun cliffs. All it needs, Danford thought, is background music by Sibelius. The music was there, melancholy; the warning moan of foghorns, the wash of surf.

The sun was waiting for them downtown. The air sparkled, the city and its hills looked two-dimensional, like a colored travel poster.

They pulled up in front of the Maxwell Building on Post Street and Danford got out.

"Thanks for everything, Pal," he said, slamming the car door. "If you see O'Rorke, tell him I'm ready any time he is."

Danford watched Pal drive away, then turned and walked into the build-

ing. This early there was only one elevator in operation. The old boy running it jumped to his feet, looked frightened. For eighteen floors he didn't speak. A record. He would call the police, Bogey knew. It didn't matter.

His office was quiet. It smelled of files and cigarettes and furniture polish and faintly of woman. He ran up the blinds and opened a window. Immediately, cold air shook out the raw silk drapes, plucked at the papers in leather baskets on his desk.

He dropped into his high-backed leather chair, absently caressed the velvet-soft wood of his desk. As he leaned back, he felt O'Rorke's bottle press into his side. He placed it on the desk, noting it was half full. That would never do. He removed the cork and put the bottle to his lips.

He drew his calendar pad across the desk, wrote:

"Imogene—call Mort Strickland, tell him I . . ."

He doodled on a corner of the pad. He should leave some word for his client. But what could he say? *"Sorry, old man, I wasn't able to handle your hearing in Sacramento yesterday. I had a date to strangle my wife."*

Strickland would figure that out for himself.

He emptied the bottle, tossed it in the wastebasket. Then he scratched lines through the memo to his secretary.

What was delaying O'Rorke?

He had chain-smoked three cigarettes, was lighting his fourth when he heard O'Rorke pounding on the outer office door. He turned to the window, opened it all the way. O'Rorke was calling his name. Danford stood there, wind whipping his tie and feathering his thin hair. The drapes snapped like red pennants.

A loud crash at his feet—a Ming horse had fouled in the drapes, been swept from its place on the bookcase. "You beat the gun a little, Citation," he smiled.

BOGEY walked rapidly through the library to the outer office. O'Rorke's shadow was a vague blot on the frosted-glass door.

"Coming, Red!" cried Bogey.

He threw the door open and looked up at Red towering in the murky hallway. Palimelio was peering around his chief's shoulder.

"You had me worried, son," said O'Rorke.

"You didn't think I'd take a powder, did you, Red?"

Red shoved his hat back with a flip of one thumb. "I didn't know, chum. A guy does some queer things, I mean, when—"

Bogey, leading them toward his private office, remarked, "When he's troubled by his conscience?"

O'Rorke rumbled, "Yeah."

Bogey said, "I'm cleaning up a few things, Red. As long as I figure to be out of circulation for a while, I thought I'd better. I won't be long."

O'Rorke nodded, "Take your time."

Palimelio flopped on one corner of the leather davenport. It had been a long night for Pal. He looked like the unmade bed he obviously wished he was in.

Bogey went to his desk, opened a drawer and began looking over some papers. The open window and the shattered Ming horse registered with Red. He jerked his head at the window.

"Aren't you overdoing the fresh air a little?" he asked.

Bogey glanced up as though he weren't quite certain what O'Rorke had said. "Fresh air? Ah—oh—I hadn't noticed."

O'Rorke drew the window partly to. "I don't suppose it's any of my business," he said, "but you wouldn't have had something else in mind when you opened it so wide?"

Bogey seemed embarrassed for words. The paper in his hand was shaking. "As a matter of fact," he admitted, "perhaps I did."

"I thought so. That would've been a

dumb stunt, Buster. I'm glad you talked yourself out of it."

Danford dropped the paper. "I don't know," he sighed. "Maybe it was dumb to stick around. We'll have to wait and see."

"Listen, Bogey," said O'Rorke, "this is bad, but not *that* bad."

"I'd say it depended on where you're sitting, Red—or, more precisely, where you very well *may* sit."

"I told you last night," O'Rorke slapped the top of Bogey's desk, "I told you we weren't going to let anything rugged happen to you. You've got friends in this town, Bogey—they know what it was with Blanche."

"I understand," said Danford. "I'm sorry I can't be grateful for all my friends want to do for me."

"So you're not grateful," O'Rorke snorted. "You still had no reason to even think about jumping."

Danford leaned back in his chair, fished a crumpled cigarette out of a package. "What do you want me to say, Red? That I'm a bad boy—a no-character jerk?"

O'Rorke lit Bogey's cigarette. He was smiling again. "I'm sorry, chum—I was out of line. After all, you didn't jump. That's the important thing."

Bogey looked at the detective through a cloud of smoke. He could see O'Rorke's smile—only his smile; even, white teeth. For a minute, the smile was O'Rorke.

"Is it?" he asked. "Is it important?"

"What do you man? Of course it's important," growled O'Rorke good-naturedly. "Right now I could be riding with you to the morgue. We're up eighteen stories—I don't think you'd be a happy-looking corpse."

"Do you think it would've mattered how I looked—to me?"

O'Rorke perched on the corner of Bogey's desk, glanced at Palimelio sitting across the room. "Get this Danford," he chuckled. "A comedian."

Pal uncrossed his legs, grinned. "Yeah."

Bogey held his cigarette out in front of him, watched the long ash tremble and spill. "I'm sorry, Red," he said. "I didn't mean to sound facetious."

"Skip it—you worry too much."

"Right," Bogey admitted, "I do. I worry about the damnedest things. How Blanche died, for instance. Let's assume I didn't kill her. There was somebody else she was giving as rotten a shake as she'd given me. Suppose the other night she told this character she was meeting me for dinner. Maybe it meant breaking a date. She'd done it before, too many times. There were other guys. Our potential killer is a savvy enough gent to realize he's getting the brush-off."

DANFORD stopped and counted the house — O'Rorke and Palimelio watching him intently. He went on: "Our boy is burning up with the big, fat torch he's carrying. He knows the situation—I mean, between Blanche and me—knows after I leave the house, Blanche will be alone. So he waits.

"She lets him in and they have a row. Remember, he's made up his mind. Blanche could make anybody blow a gasket. He is going to kill. This gets over to Blanche. She's terrified—tries to convince her lover she was seeing me only because I had a deal on the house . . .

"Ironic, isn't it, Red? For once in her life Blanche was a hundred per cent on the level."

"Yeah," muttered the detective, "a real tear-jerker . . ."

Bogey shrugged. "In trying to convince him, she showed him the deed. It was the final piece of business the killer needed. He knew if he tore up the deed and threw it in the waste-basket, no one would ever believe the murder didn't happen just as you explained it to me. He could even make sure they didn't."

O'Rorke was standing over Bogey, glowering down at him. "What are you driving at, chum?"

"That's how it was, wasn't it, Red?" he answered quietly.

"I don't dig you," scowled Red.

"All right," Bogey smiled. "I'll stop fencing. You're the character I'm talking about."

"You're nuts!" the big cop exploded.

Bogey's laugh sounded raw. "One of us is. Maybe you can sell the D.A. the idea of Blanche tearing up the deed to spite me. But don't expect me to buy it. Money didn't mean any more to Blanche than her life. She had to have it; and unless we sold the house, she understood times were going to be awfully tough."

O'Rorke managed to smile. "You talk like a guy the Narcotics Detail ought to know about."

"I suppose I do," nodded Bogey. "All this conversation and not a shred of proof. It does sound as though I were on junk, doesn't it?"

O'Rorke laughed. "Bogey, look—I know you're upset. I'm going to forget what you said. We're still—"

Danford was shaking his head. "I don't believe you will forget it, Red. I won't. As soon as you've booked me, I'll be out on a writ. I'll have time to make the rounds—find people who saw you with Blanche; making love, scrapping. There's always somebody. I'll promote a lie detector test for you, Red. As you said, I've got friends in San Francisco. Piece by piece, I'm going to put this thing together and hang it around your neck!"

O'Rorke's florid coloring had begun to run. There were white spots over the knotted muscles of his jaw as Danford continued the needlework:

"In your book, I figure as a prize ingrate. How many guys would frame me and then go out of their way to see I didn't get the gas chamber? A sweet touch, Red. It shows heart, imagination. Like letting me leave your apartment last night. How could I suspect a gesture as open-handed as that?"

O'Rorke was standing at the window, his back to the room.

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"I'm not going to be so concerned about what happens to you, Red," Bogey went on. "They can give you anything—just so long as it's gas!"

Red stiffened, wheeled. His lips trembled, tried to make words. "Go to hell, Danford—you wise—"

His eyes were filling, throat working. He took one enraged stride toward Bogey, lunged suddenly backward over the sill. His hand caught in the drapes. For a moment, it seemed he would hang on. Then the red drapes ripped off their rod and disappeared. There was no sound, no drawn-out scream.

Danford and Palimelio were ice statues. Bogey realized he hadn't been breathing. His chest hurt. He felt light-headed, sick. He pulled himself up on his desk.

When he moved, Palimelio moved. The detective sergeant lumbered to the window. He looked down at the street. He turned slowly to Danford, squinting his eyes as though they burned.

"He was a good guy," he rasped, choking. "A damn good guy."

Danford nodded. "We're all good guys."

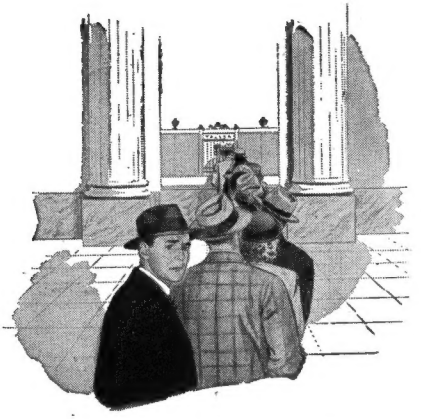
Footsteps over Water

By Ray Cummings

(Continued from page 86)

when the shot crumpled him, and Muir and the rod had fallen close beside the canoe . . . a big expensive reel filled with expensive linen line, and a trolling spoon with its gang of hooks . . .

And the dangling lure—Patton saw it now where it hung hooked, wedged in the crotch of the gracefully pointed stern of his canoe! No connection with this murder? The three men wonderingly had followed the tiny thread from Muir's body in the cove, out here to his killer!



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